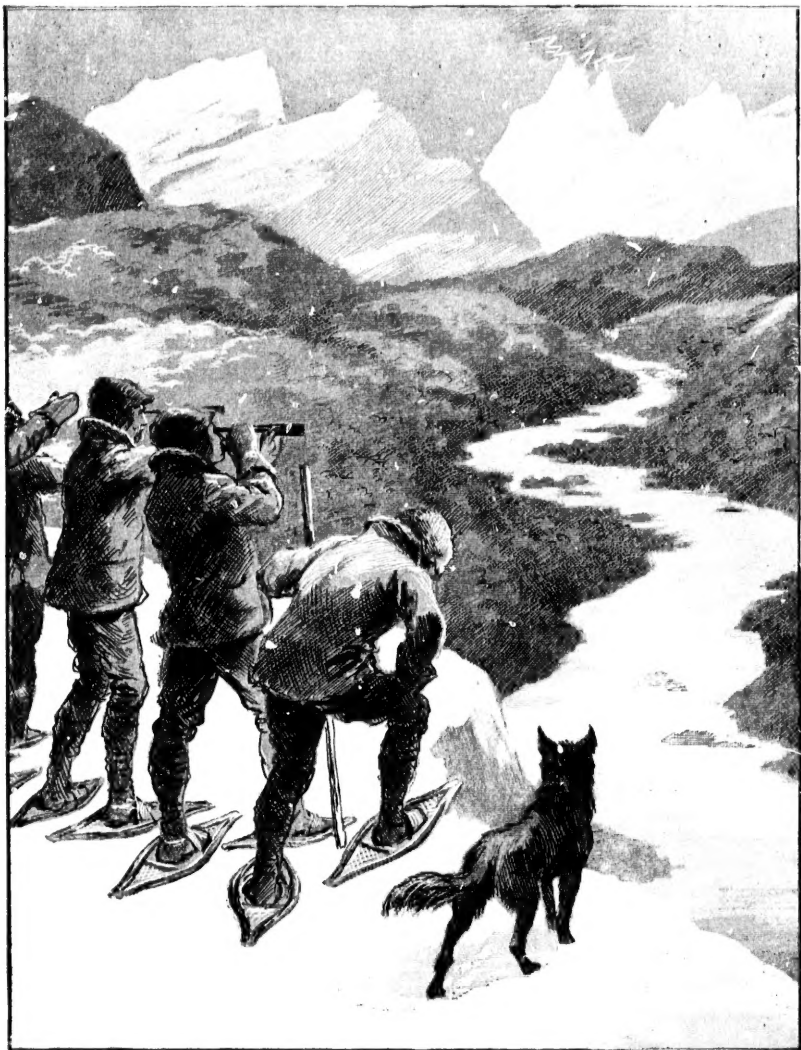
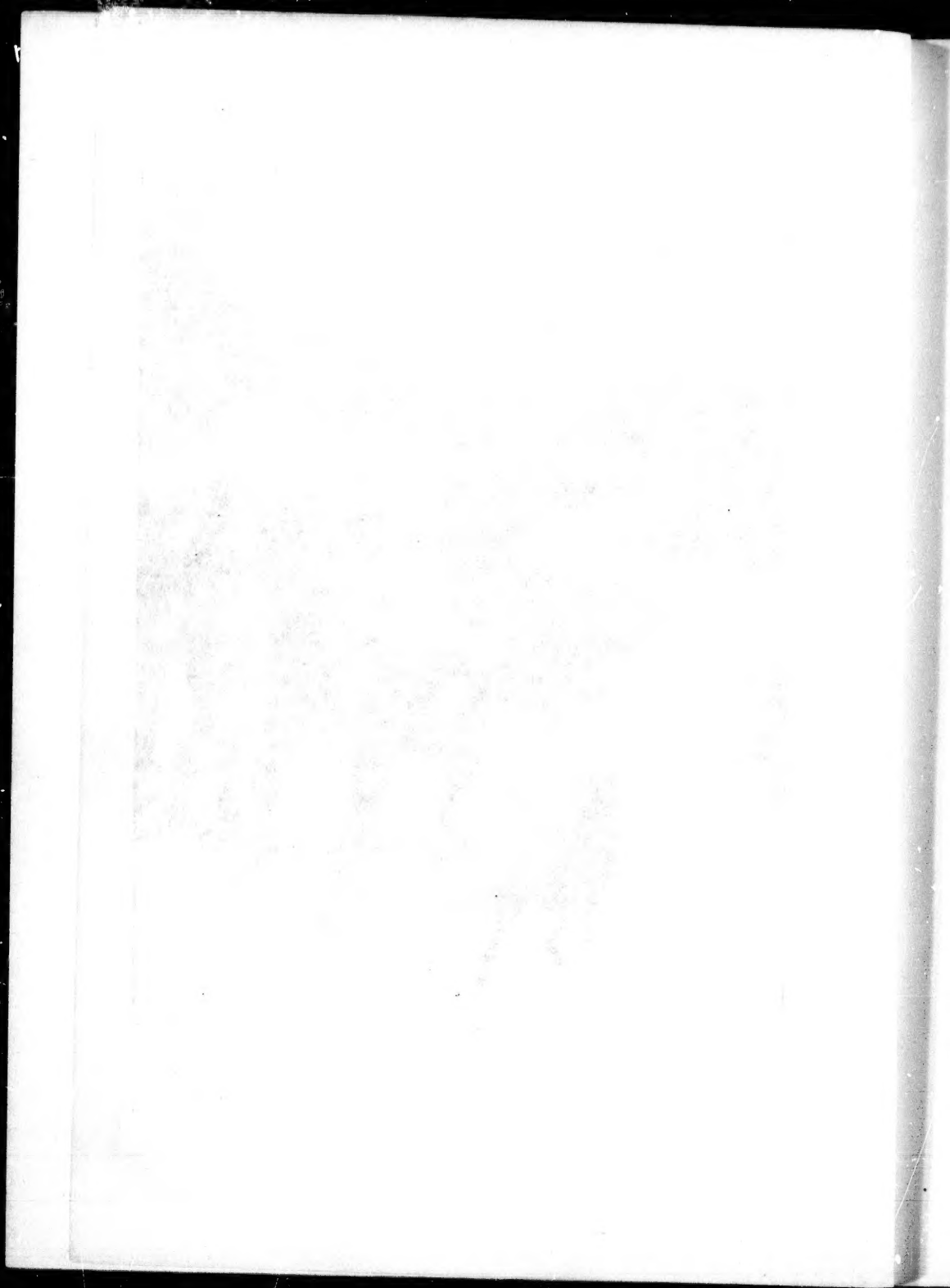




Before us stretched a narrow but level valley, in which patches of snow alternated with green, the latter being principally by the side of the water that flowed through it.

PAGE 135.





THE
PARADISE OF THE NORTH

A STORY OF
DISCOVERY AND ADVENTURE AROUND THE POLE

BY
DAVID LAWSON JOHNSTONE
AUTHOR OF 'RICHARD TREGELLAS,' 'THE MOUNTAIN KINGDOM,' ETC.

WITH FIFTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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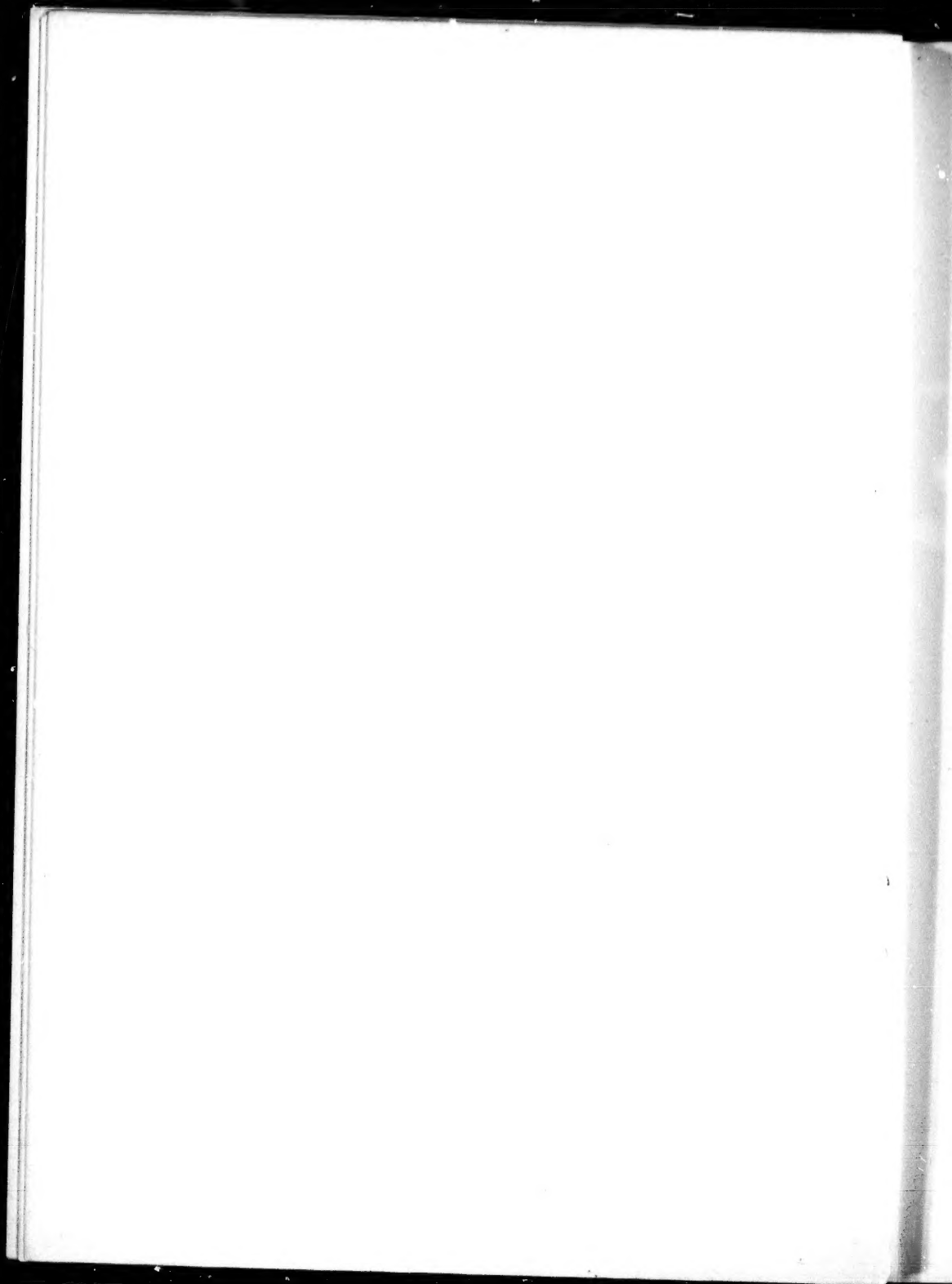
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THE PARADISE OF THE NORTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST REQUEST OF RANDOLPH TORRENS.



HE solicitor cleared his throat. 'The will I am about to read,' he began, 'was drawn up in June last. Mr Torrens had just been informed by his doctor that he might be carried off at any moment by the disease of the heart from which he eventually died. Accordingly, he called upon me and gave me instructions to prepare this will, which was signed next day. With your permission, Miss Torrens, I shall now proceed to read it.'

There were not many present, this gloomy February morning, to listen to the reading of the last will and testament of Randolph Torrens of the Grange: his only child and heiress, Edith Torrens; her aunt; I, Godfrey Oliphant, of Dreghorn Towers, the manor-house of the next parish; my younger brother Cecil, who had a place as by right at Edith's side; one or two neighbours; a few of the servants, there on their mistress's invitation; and Mr Smiles, the family lawyer. The funeral was just over, and the great crowd which had assembled in the little country churchyard to do honour to the dead had melted quietly away. Now only the memory of a good and upright man was left. For more

years than I could remember, Randolph Torrens had been my best and truest friend; and as I sat in his library, listening to his last commands, I could scarcely realise that I should never again hear his cheery greeting.

The friendship between the two houses had always been close, and the bond had been strengthened by my brother's engagement, a few months before, to Miss Torrens. Even then, incongruous as the thought apparently was, I could not help thinking how lucky Cecil had been to win the love of such a girl as Edith. Sitting there together, they seemed 'made each for the other, in the good Providence of life,' as the old chronicler quaintly has it. Cecil—clean-limbed and handsome (I don't mind confessing that the traditionary good looks of the family have somehow missed its present head), in a word, as good a specimen of young English manhood as one could wish to meet; and Edith, a perfect match—her beauty enhanced by the look of pathos in her dark eyes, and the expression eloquent of her grief.

She looked up as the lawyer spoke.

'Pray go on, Mr Smiles,' she said.

The will began in the usual way; bequests of small sums were made to the servants and others, and a larger amount to Mr Smiles; an annuity of seven hundred and fifty pounds was left to his sister, and five thousand pounds each bequeathed to my brother and me, 'as a slight mark of appreciation of the coming connection between the Oliphants of Dreghorn Towers and my family, and of personal friendship towards the said Godfrey Oliphant, Esq., and Cecil Oliphant, Esq.' Then the residue of the estate, consisting of landed property in various counties, articles of value, &c., and the sum of one hundred and ten thousand pounds invested in the Three per Cents., were left unreservedly to his daughter, Edith Belhaven Torrens, Mr Smiles and myself being named as executors. At the same time a sealed packet was to be handed to Miss Torrens; and, the will went on, it was the wish of the testator that his

daughter should exercise her own judgment whether the directions therein conveyed should be carried out.

'And this packet,' concluded Mr Smiles, 'it is now my duty to hand to you, Miss Torrens. It was given to me, I may say, at the time the will was signed.'

The servants and strangers here retired, and Edith, who had abstained from examining it while they were present, now took it up with some curiosity. On the cover was the following inscription :

TO MY DAUGHTER, EDITH TORRENS—To be opened after my death, and read in the presence of my executors and Mr Cecil Oliphant, and such other persons as she may desire to be present.

'All those mentioned being here,' said Edith, 'I suppose there is no reason why this should not be opened now?'

'None whatever,' said the lawyer; and so the seals of the packet were broken, and its contents found to be several manuscripts in the handwriting of Randolph Torrens, of which the principal was evidently one headed in the same manner as the envelope.

'May I ask you to read this, Mr Smiles?' inquired Edith, after glancing over it; and the lawyer, who was apparently as anxious as any of us to know what it said, answered in the affirmative, and forthwith commenced :

TO MY DAUGHTER—It is my earnest desire that you carry out the directions contained in this note, and it is only in case it seems to you and to those whose advice you take that to do so would be madness, that I leave the matter to your discretion. It is because I am confident that my last wish will be sacred to you, that I do not take other means of ensuring that the hope of my life shall at length be converted into a certainty.

I have left you a sum of money amounting to one hundred and ten thousand pounds, invested in the Three per Cents.—the result of fortunate speculation, animated by one aim. My wish is that this money, or as much of it as may be necessary, should be used for the special purpose of an Arctic expedition. To this

end my instructions are : Accompanying this you will find details (drawn up by one of the greatest living authorities on polar exploration) to guide whoever may undertake the enterprise, as to the buying or building of a suitable steam-vessel, and its equipment in the most thorough manner with *every* Arctic necessary. The captain appointed must have experience, and the crew be well chosen and amenable to discipline. Let the vessel be provisioned for three years.

It is my wish that your future husband should accompany the expedition as your representative ; and I hope his brother Godfrey may also go.

The vessel will sail in the course of the July following its preparation to the Nova Zembla Sea ; and, if the season be a good one (if bad, the expedition to be postponed until the following year), penetrate north-east to latitude $83^{\circ} 25'$, and longitude $48^{\circ} 5' E$. At this point, if the party should be fortunate enough to reach it, will be found a land-locked bay, on a mountainous coast which has never been visited but once, but which I now anticipate to be either a part of Gillis Land, or of the land lately discovered by Lieutenant Payer and the Austrian expedition, and called by them Kaiser Franz-Josef Land. It was here that I and others wintered thirty years ago ; and although, for many reasons into which I cannot enter, no account of this voyage was published, it is a fact that our party penetrated farther north than any other has yet done. Here, as there are extensive coal-fields, the expedition may winter in comfort. Then *a thorough search will be made within a radius of twenty miles of the bay, and especially in a NE. direction, towards the mountains which will be seen in the distance.* This is to be the principal motive of the expedition : To examine the ground carefully for traces of white men, and to follow up any such traces to an end. My reason for this step I am precluded from giving, but I hope it will be enough that I consider it of such importance that I should not care to die without taking means to have it carried through.

The search over, those engaged in it are at liberty to undertake any other project they may have in their minds. It is to be remembered that this point, if they gain it, is nearer the North Pole than has up to the present time been reached. I have every reason for believing that this route is much more practicable than that generally advocated—namely, *via* Smith's Sound and Robeson

Channel ; and so, if that be an inducement, those who go will have a better chance of attaining the goal, which so many have striven to reach in vain, than has yet fallen to the lot of any other party !

I have only to request, further, that the strictest secrecy be kept regarding these proceedings. This is more necessary than may be thought.

You have now my directions before you, Edith, and it remains for you to say whether this expedition shall or shall not be despatched ; whether the hope I have long cherished is to come to naught or is to be carried out ; and whether a mystery which I have never been able to solve myself is to be solved after my death through the agency of my daughter. The choice is before you, and it may not be long before you will have to decide, for I have just heard from the doctor that I may die at any moment.

RANDOLPH TORRENS.

June 14, 188—.

As the lawyer finished reading this extraordinary document, the five of us simultaneously gave a gasp of astonishment. Had Randolph Torrens really meant what he had written ? or had he been acting under a temporary aberration of the mind ? But the instructions were plain enough, and all doubts as to how they would be received by the one principally concerned were put to an end by Edith.

‘I don’t know what you think of papa’s directions,’ she said, in a tone of determination, as if she expected opposition, ‘but I mean to carry them out, if it costs every penny of the hundred and ten thousand pounds and everything else I have ! I know now what he meant just before he died,’ she went on, her eyes filling with tears at the recollection, ‘when he said, “Edith, be sure and obey me, even after my death.” And I will, as far as I can !’

‘But, Edith,’ interrupted her aunt, ‘think of wasting such an amount of money as that—a hundred thousand pounds !’

She stopped as if stupefied by the mere thought, and the lawyer chimed in.

'Consider, my dear Miss Torrens! Don't rush into a decision all at once!'

She turned to him.

'Then what do *you* think of it, Mr Smiles?' she asked. 'What do you advise?'

'My hands are tied, so to speak,' he answered. 'Some time before your father's death, he called upon me and took me in a manner into his confidence. He strictly enjoined me not to influence your decision in any way, nor, particularly, to do or say anything against the project, but merely to acquiesce in the decision you arrive at. But I could see that his mind was thoroughly bent on this work being undertaken after his death—why, I cannot even suspect.'

'I am equally in the dark,' said Edith. 'All I know is that before his marriage he had been several voyages to the Arctic Seas. Of this one he never said a word to me; but I remember his excitement when, in 1874, he heard of the discovery of Franz-Josef Land, and of his disappointment that the explorers had not penetrated farther north. And often while he has been asleep after dinner I've heard him mutter about "ice" and "open water" and "treachery." "Treachery" was a word he often used. Perhaps it had some connection with the mystery he speaks of.'

'That we must discover,' said Cecil. 'We must reach the place mentioned by some means or other; your father's directions leave us no other alternative. If we didn't, it would be like a breach of trust. We *must* go!'

Edith gave him a glance of gratitude, and then asked what my opinion was.

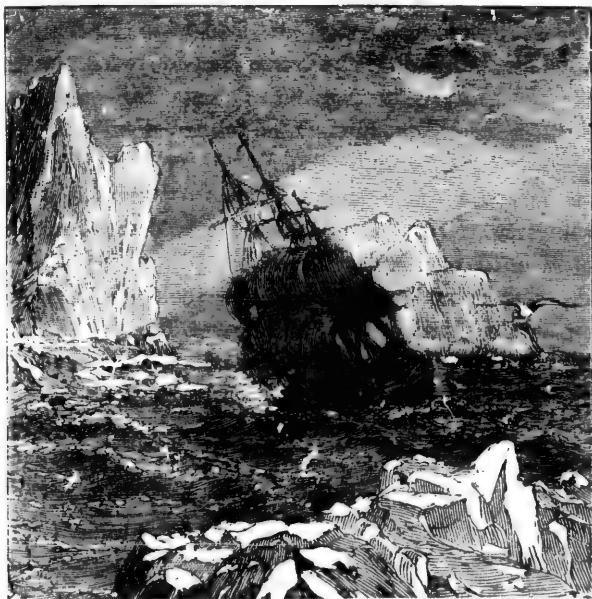
'That we should first take technical advice—consult somebody who has been to the Arctic. Then we may know our ground. And, fortunately,' I cried, 'we've got the authority ready to our hand.'

For a sudden thought had struck me. On the shore, half-way between the Grange and Dreghorn, stood a house known all over the Riding as Narwhal Cottage. It was

occupied by a retired seaman, who had been for thirty years the commander of Greenland or Spitzbergen whalers (alternated, in the earlier part of his career, with occasional voyages as ice-pilot to Franklin search and other Arctic expeditions), before, in his own words, saving enough to come to an anchor on land. Captain Sneddon he was called; and many were the stories he had told me of his adventures in the frozen sea, with which he was perhaps as well acquainted as any man alive. We could hardly, indeed, have found one better suited for our purpose if we had searched all England.

'Just the man!' declared Cecil, when I had mentioned his name.

'Then let us see him at once!' said Edith; and by her tone I knew that she reckoned on the worthy captain as a recruit.





CHAPTER II.

THE OPINION OF CAPTAIN SNEDDON.



CAPTAIN SNEDDON, however, was not consulted just at the moment. Edith in her impulsiveness wished to see him without loss of time ; but the lawyer had one or two remarks to make before the meeting broke up.

'Your suggestion is a very sensible one, Mr Oliphant,' he said, approvingly, 'and I am only sorry that I cannot accompany you on your visit to this gentleman. I am compelled to return to London by the first train, but I shall await your decision with the greatest interest. Whatever it may be, I have full confidence in your wisdom and discretion. As to the details Mr Torrens has referred to, I have been looking over them, and I find that, as far as I am a judge, they are very comprehensive and complete. But I presume their discussion may be postponed until you finally decide.'

And, after some further talk, he took his departure for London, while Cecil and I looked over the details of which he had spoken. They covered nearly a hundred pages of closely-written manuscript, and embraced, as the lawyer had indicated, every imaginable point connected with an Arctic expedition.

Meanwhile Edith and her aunt had been whispering together.

'Now that Mr Smiles has gone,' said the former, 'I don't see why we shouldn't get this decided as quickly as possible. And there is only one decision we can come to. Of course I

can't go out to-day, but if you wouldn't mind, Godfrey, you and Cecil might see Captain Sneddon, and tell me what he thinks.'

'Certainly we will,' I replied.

'And at once, please. Somehow, I feel that the longer we wait the more I am disobeying papa's last wish. I'm sure I shall never be easy in my mind until this expedition has started. For it *must* go; if I didn't obey that letter, I'd feel like a criminal all the rest of my life!'

'But a hundred thousand pounds to be spent in that way!' reiterated Miss Torrens the elder, as if the fact were still beyond her.

'Yes,' answered Edith, a little fiercely; 'two hundred thousand, if I had it!' Then, more gently, 'What does it matter, aunt? Haven't I, without this, more than enough already? Anyhow, rich or poor, the expedition starts. As to that there can be no other thought!'

'Then what was the use of this show of deliberation?' I asked myself. But I saw that the events of the day had put Edith into a state of nervous excitement, and so, as the best means of calming her, Cecil and I resolved to pay our visit to the captain at the moment. Besides, we were burning with curiosity to have a chance of talking over the matter with one who had experience at his back. So in a short time we took our leave, and as may be supposed, our conversation between the Grange and Narwhal Cottage was of nothing save the dying request—command, one might say—of Randolph Torrens. We discussed it from every point of view, and with more or less enthusiasm, and I was not surprised to find that Cecil was quite determined to go. As for myself, I succeeded better in concealing my real feelings.

Narwhal Cottage stood a little back from the road, sheltered by a cliff from the sea winds, and within a hundred yards of a tiny cove that harboured the captain's boat. Upon the cliff stood a mast bearing a genuine 'crow's-nest,' one used

by its owner during many a hazardous voyage in the frozen seas. Above this tapered the flagstaff, the Union Jack this day at half-mast. The cottage itself was a small but cosy house, 'for,' as the captain was wont to say, 'it's like killing more whales than you can carry to have a bigger dwelling than you need.' His maiden sister, and only relative, was his housekeeper, and, in sight and earshot of the sea as he was, he was as thoroughly happy as he could be while not upon that element.

He was in the crow's-nest—in which he spent most of the day, and, it was rumoured in the district, most of the night also—as we came up; and, seeing us, he descended with the agility of a sailor, and advanced to meet us. He was a man of between fifty and sixty, tall, strong, and unmistakably a seaman; his face baked brick-colour by thirty or forty years' exposure to sea-breeze and sun; his eyes shrewd, intelligent, and those of a man who is conscious of having done his duty, and of being capable of doing it again; and his voice loud, hearty, and as free of affectation as lifelong shouting of orders could make it.

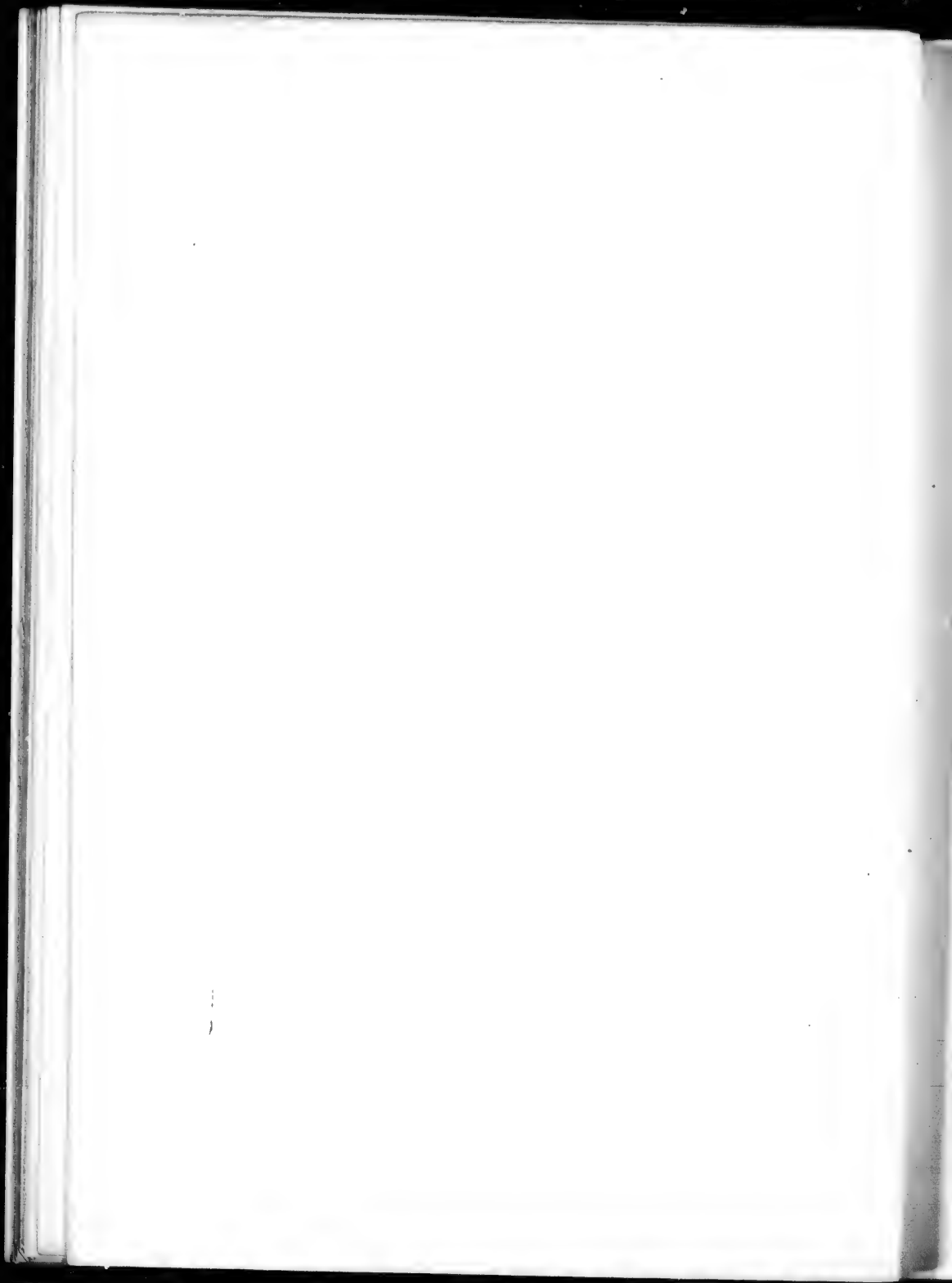
'Glad to see you, Mr Oliphant, and you, Mr Cecil,' he said, 'and sorry, too, in those clothes. You will come in and sit down a minute? Thank ye. Mr Torrens's death was as sudden as the fall of an iceberg. I saw him that morning, looking as healthy as you or me. Poor Miss Edith! How does she take it, Mr Cecil? Maybe I shouldn't mention it, and you'll excuse me doing it in my rough way, but it's your duty now to look after her as if she was a vessel on her return voyage, with every barrel full. And,' he went on, with a kindly glance at Cecil, 'you'll do it, I'm sure of that.'

'Please Heaven, I will,' answered Cecil, sincerely, giving the old sailor a cordial hand-shake.

By this time we had entered the cottage, and passed into the captain's cabin, as he called it—a small, circular room, fitted up as nearly as possible like a ship's cabin. It was full of curiosities: harpoons and firearms of every description,



The captain was in the crow's-nest as we came up.



models of the various vessels he had commanded, Esquimaux spears, walrus tusks, relics of Arctic expeditions, and so on. Here, as soon as we were seated, he produced a bottle of Highland whisky and some biscuits from a locker.

'Now, captain,' began Cecil, when we had gratified him by drinking his health, 'we've come down to consult you about a very important matter, one that you can advise us about as nobody else that Miss Torrens knows can.'

'Heave ahead, my boy! You shall have my advice, so far as it is worth anything, with the greatest of pleasure.'

Thus encouraged, Cecil went on to relate the events of the morning, read the manuscript of the dead man, and finally repeated the substance of the conversation which had ensued. While he was doing so I watched his auditor closely to see what effect it had upon him; but all I saw was that he followed it with the deepest interest, occasionally nodding to himself as if in satisfaction.

'Well, what is your candid opinion, Captain Sneddon?' I inquired, when my brother had finished.

'With your permission, I will tell you,' he replied, after a minute or two's thought. 'First, that in my opinion Miss Edith is bound to carry out her father's instructions. Dead men must be obeyed; in honour they've a sort of right to it, over and above the usual parental right in this case. Then as to the possibility of success: $83^{\circ} 25'$ is a pretty stiff latitude, especially up Spitzbergen way. Parry's farthest, the highest in those seas, falls far short of it— $82^{\circ} 45'$ it was, I think—and it was across nearly two hundred miles of ice. But I don't say it's impossible; the unexpected always turns up in the Arctic, as the saying goes. Sometimes myself I've seen a season commence without any prospect of the ice breaking up, and yet come home full up to the brim. It's chance, and nothing else. This year may be bad, and it may be good; and even if it's good, you'll be lucky to get farther north than 80° .'

'Have you been often in the Nova Zembla Sea?' Cecil

took occasion to ask while the captain was refilling his glass.

'Above a dozen times to the west of Spitzbergen, but only twice to the east, between it and Zembla. The first time I was stopped by the ice-barrier in latitude 74° , and came home empty; that, to be sure, was an exceptional year. The other time was in the *Moray Firth* of Feterhead in '71, when I had the record cargo of the season. We went round the top of Spitzbergen, saw in the distance this Gillis or Giles' Land you spoke of, touched at Nova Zembla, and found no ice to the north of it up to latitude 78° . I've heard it said that you might almost have sailed to the Pole that year; anyway, if I had been my own master, I believe *I* might have discovered the North-east Passage, instead of this Swedish fellow that has done it since.'

'Then' interposed Cecil, eagerly, 'we've at least one chance in two of reaching this point?'

'By no means!' was the emphatic reply. 'The vessels that usually go to the Arctic—such as whalers, and those foreign scientific turns-out that are pleased with anything—these may have an equal chance. But a vessel with a special purpose like yours—no! One chance in fifty, I should say; perhaps one in a hundred when the purpose is the Farthest North. But for all that I don't say *stay* ashore; if you do go, you may manage to catch that very chance. And if this paper of Mr Torrens's is correct—I don't say it isn't—he reached that point, and why shouldn't another?'

'No reason at all,' said Cecil, who seemed determined to perceive no obstacles in our way.

'No,' continued the captain. 'As for the paper, it seems to me bony and fidy, as the lawyers say; and if it isn't, the squire knew what he was talking about at anyrate. Point one—he has struck the right season. August and September are the only open months in those seas. Point two—he's right about the Pole; if you do reach $83^{\circ} 25'$, and find land to the northward, you're bound to succeed.

Of course I don't know anything of this route, but I've seen something of the Smith's Sound one, and it's impracticable. I knew Dr Kane, one of whose party said he saw the open Polar Sea; and I've met Captain Hall of the *Polaris*, who died up there; and yet, if you ask any whaler who knows anything about it, you'll hear that an open basin's rank nonsense.'

At this point we handed him the detailed lists which had been affixed to the document, and requested him to state what he thought of them. He examined them carefully before answering.

'All I have to say is,' he said at length, 'that if you carry out these orders, as I should in your place, your expedition will be the best and completest that ever sailed to the Arctic seas! And what's more,' he went on, 'I'll take it as the kindest thing you ever did if you'll accept my services in whatever way you please, so that, when you sail, you carry James Sneddon with you. It doesn't matter what as—captain, mate, or seaman—but I mean to go, if you'll have me!'

'Then your opinion is,' I summed up, catching some of his excitement, 'that we should carry out the squire's request so far as in us lies, and trust to Providence for success?'

'It is. If you don't go, I've mistaken both Miss Edith and yourselves, and you'll regret it all your lives.'

'You are right, captain,' I said. 'We shall go to the North Pole if possible, and you and Cecil and I shall be of the party.'

In this way was our decision arrived at, as it was evident from the beginning would be the case—arrived at honestly, but perhaps with only a vague sense of the responsibility of that decision, the consequences of which none of us foresaw or could even imagine. Then we went over the principal details with the captain, whose practical knowledge we found to be of immense value. Till then I had had no idea how thoroughly he was master of his profession; but,

now that I did know, I made a mental note of it for future use. In the end it was agreed that, after consultation with Edith and Mr Smiles, we should decide as to the best manner of preparing the expedition according to the squire's detailed instructions.

'And,' said the captain to us, as we bade him good-bye at his door, 'be sure and submit my name to Miss Edith as her first volunteer.'

That we did so at once the reader may be certain, and also that Edith was much gratified by the offer, and by the decisive way in which it was made.

Before we went farther, however, Cecil suggested that we should have some one to look after the multifarious arrangements that fell to be made—in fact, to be commander of the enterprise for the present; and he was kind enough to mention me as 'the one best fitted for the work of organisation, which, you know,' he said, 'wouldn't suit a fellow of my habits at all.'

As Edith backed him up, I could do nothing but accept, and I may only mention here that every one concerned afterwards worked so well together that my leadership in that respect was pretty much of a sinecure.

My first step, with the concurrence of Edith and my brother, was to offer Captain Sneddon the command of the vessel to be built or bought. No better man, I knew, or one with more experience, could be had; and, besides, I wished to be able to avail myself officially of his advice on all points on which he could speak with authority.

'Will I accept?' he said, when I made him the offer; 'aye, proud and willing and eager am I to do it, Mr Oliphant. As I said before, I would have gone with such an expedition as a common hand, and now you offer me the command of the vessel! Well, sir, I accept, and if I can help to make it a success you won't have reason to complain. And one thing I'm sure of, though it may look like a boast, and that is, that you'll have the best vessel and the best crew that

money can command—and what can't it? I'll pick the men myself, and in Dundee or Peterhead there isn't a Greenland sailor who won't ship under James Sneddon; and there isn't one I don't know and can't vouch for! Yes, barring accidents, this voyage'll be a record one. How could it be anything else, with details like these, and plenty of money to carry 'em out?

Thus it was that our captain was chosen, and a start thus made with the fulfilment of Randolph Torrens's last request; and as I signed the papers in all due formality, I felt sure that not the least enthusiastic member of the adventurous expedition, of which the history is related in the following pages, would be Captain James Sneddon.





CHAPTER III.

DR FELIX LORIMER JOINS THE EXPEDITION.

BEFORE the end of April our arrangements were so far completed that a steamer had been bought and fitted up for the special purposes we had in view. The instructions of Randolph Torrens were that a vessel should be built, if one could not be obtained which came up to his requirements; but, fortunately, Captain Sneddon was able to recommend one that fulfilled the conditions. This was the *Aurora* of Dundee, one of the whaling-fleet that annually proceeds from that port to Baffin Bay. She was a vessel of four hundred and fifty-two tons and seventy-five horse-power, and had been once to the Greenland fishery, having been built by Stephen & Sons for that purpose only two years before. As she had been specially designed for ice-navigation, she required very little strengthening when she came into our hands. The only considerable alterations we made were to introduce sheets of felt between the inside planking and the lining in order to keep up the temperature should we be compelled to winter in the pack, and to have davits on the quarters for shipping and unshipping the rudder when in danger from the ice.

Naturally, our proceedings did not escape notice in Dundee. But the general opinion there, when it became reported amongst those interested in such matters that Captain Sneddon had bought the *Aurora*, 'and paid a pretty stiff price for her, too,' was that he intended going on a whaling cruise on his own account. He was so well known as a

daring ice-navigator and successful whaler that nobody was surprised thereby. This was as well, seeing that under our orders we could not divulge our real mission; and for the same reason Sneddon, in engaging the hands, had to be somewhat indefinite in his statements. He had no difficulty, however, in getting together a good crew. Besides the general readiness to ship under him, the offered pay (double the ordinary wages, and a bonus of one hundred pounds to each man if we succeeded in our object) was such that we could have quadrupled our number of thirty-eight if we had wished.

'You may depend upon it,' said the captain, 'that you'll get men to ship with you on the most risky voyages if only you offer enough.'

Although we were not to sail until July, all the men were engaged during April, for the reason that if we had not chosen them then they would have gone to the Baffin Bay whaling at the beginning of May. They were the pick of the fleet, and many were the lamentations of Greenland skippers that year that the best men were not available. Each hand was well known to the captain, and was willing to spend one winter or more in the ice; 'for,' as he said to them, 'I may tell you at once, though in a manner under sealed orders at present, that our voyage won't be an ordinary one.'

The mystery which otherwise might have surrounded the vessel and its destination was thus partly averted by the captain's adroitness, and partly by the confidence of his men in him.

In other ways I found Captain Sneddon invaluable. There was not a point connected with the vessel to which he did not personally attend, and so thoroughly was he acquainted with all matters pertaining to circumpolar navigation that I felt sure that if we did not succeed it would be through no fault of his. His discretion, as I have indicated, was beyond reproach; and so sure was I that the squire's injunc-

tion as to secrecy had been carried out, that I was more than surprised when, one morning at breakfast, I saw in a well-known society paper the following paragraph :

It is whispered that the late Mr Randolph Torrens of the Grange, Yorkshire, whose death we announced a few weeks ago, has left the large sum of one hundred thousand pounds for the purpose of equipping an expedition to the North Pole. We understand that it is now in preparation, and will shortly start. It will be under the command of Messrs Godfrey and Cecil Oliphant of Dreghorn, the latter of whom is engaged to Miss Torrens. The result of this enterprise will be awaited with much interest.

‘Look at that!’ I said, throwing the paper over to Cecil.

‘The deuce!’ he ejaculated, as he read it. ‘How on earth, I wonder, have they found out?’

‘Goodness knows!’ I replied; ‘but it’s confoundedly awkward, for now we’ll have no peace until we sail. I wish I knew.’

I was not long in discovering the culprit. Having occasion to be over at the Grange that morning, I read the paragraph to Edith and her aunt, and asked if they knew of its author.

‘I don’t, for one,’ said Edith; ‘and I don’t suppose aunt has mentioned the subject to any one—have you, aunt?’

She said this quite unsuspectingly, but I saw at once she had struck the mark. And, knowing well the elder Miss Torrens’s nature and love of gossip, I was not surprised when she replied, somewhat guiltily :

‘I’m afraid I haven’t been so reticent. Indeed, I saw no reason for it. I was so much against this mad scheme of throwing away your fortune—a hundred thousand pounds, too!—that I mentioned it the other day when writing to Lady Wyllard. And that’s all I know about it.’

It was quite clear now, for I knew that Sir Thomas Wyllard, besides being proprietor of the paper in question, was supposed to take also a considerable interest in the editing of it.

Luckily for us, a rival journal had a statement on its own responsibility the following day to the effect that 'it had the best authority for announcing that there was no truth in the story,' and, as proof, pointing to the will, in which the Pole was not even mentioned. What its authority was, I neither know nor care; but, at anyrate, the rumour was effectually stopped, for a confidential letter to Sir Thomas Wyllard prevented its recurrence in his paper. Even as it was, we received above a score of offers of service during that one day alone—a warning of what might have been!

One effect it had, however, for which we had reason to bless it. Two days after its appearance, Cecil and I were looking over several reports we had received from Captain Sneddon in reference to the vessel and men, when a servant brought us a card inscribed:

Dr Felix Lorimer.

EDINBURGH.

I recognised the name as that of one of the foremost *savants* of the day, a man who had a world-wide reputation, and was member of most of the learned societies of Europe. Better still, Cecil, who had studied medicine at a northern university for some time before our father's death, knew him personally as one of the lecturers at Edinburgh.

'Dr Lorimer!' he exclaimed. 'What can have brought him here? I saw the other day that he was in for one of the scientific professorships at Edinburgh, and was sure to get it. But show him up, John.'

In a minute Dr Felix Lorimer entered. He was a man of forty or so, tall and extremely thin, but with a countenance suggestive of much thought and learning, and an equal amount of sagacity not unmixed with enthusiasm. He wore eye-glasses, behind which his eyes twinkled in an extraordinarily animated manner.

'Mr Godfrey Cliphant?' he inquired, advancing into the room, and shaking hands cordially; and when I had replied in the affirmative, he went on: 'Your brother I have the pleasure of knowing. He would have made a good physician some day, if he hadn't been spoiled by fortune.'

'Take a chair, doctor,' said Cecil, with a laugh, 'and tell us if we are to congratulate you as Professor Lorimer.'

'Congratulate me!' he burst out. 'Why, haven't you heard that Hamilton Nelson has got it?—he who knows no more of science than a street newsboy. Beat me by one vote and by superior influence! And that's why I'm here.'

Dr Hamilton Nelson is, as all the world is aware, Dr Lorimer's great rival; but what connection that had with us we could not divine.

'Yes,' he resumed, 'just after I got the news that the Senatus in their wisdom had nominated Nelson, I saw that paragraph in the *Sun*'—throwing down the obnoxious society paper—'and came off at once to offer my services. I shall go with you to the North Pole, and, when I return with my theories verified, I shall annihilate him—rout him bag and baggage!'

'But doctor,' I interposed, 'haven't you seen this contradicted in yesterday's *Mercury*?'

He looked as if stupefied for a moment, and then, glancing from one to the other, he continued, quickly and with many gesticulations:

'Isn't it true, then? If it is, as it should be, I offer my services as medical officer free, subject, of course, to you, Mr Cecil. I shall conduct all the scientific observations at my own expense, and I shall subscribe five thousand pounds

towards the expenses of the expedition. If that doesn't suit you, I promise to agree to whatever terms you please; for, if an expedition starts, go with it I must!

He paused as if waiting for us to speak, and his enthusiasm was so catching that I felt inclined to accept him there and then. But I restrained myself, and instead asked him why he was so anxious to go to the Pole.

'I will tell you. In the first place, as I have remarked, I mean to controvert Dr Hamilton Nelson. His theories and mine regarding the Arctic regions are diametrically opposed. He holds, for instance, that there is an open polar sea, and this altho now, since the voyage of the *Alert*, there isn't a prominent geographer, except an American or two—perhaps not even them—who agrees with him. And what are his reasons? His first and greatest is the migration of such birds as the knot, which goes north every spring, is found still going north by the inhabitants of Greenland and Siberia, and comes south in autumn in increased numbers. It is admitted by every naturalist that they must breed somewhere around the Pole—in a land at least temporarily milder as regards climate than the known Arctic regions. But that land isn't necessarily washed by an open polar sea, as he contends, and as I deny. In the second place, he says that as the point of greatest cold is several degrees from the Pole, so the Pole is as likely to have an open sea as any given point south of that point of greatest cold. Now, what *I* contend, and mean to prove, is that the ice-cap extends over the whole circumpolar region. Open lanes may, I admit, be met with occasionally; winds and currents may produce that temporary effect; but that a permanent open and navigable basin exists is to the highest degree improbable. More: it is absolutely impossible, owing amongst other causes to the configuration of the Arctic Ocean, and to the nature and insufficiency of the channels by which the congestion of the accumulated ice might be relieved. In fact, the whole theory is as plainly a chimera as Raleigh's El Dorado. Then, Hamilton Nelson and ethnology aside,

look at what results one may attain, what discoveries one may make in geography, in hydrography, in meteorology, in geology, in zoology, in botany, in geodesy, and in many kindred sciences! And I have no hesitation in saying that an expedition which starts without some one trained to take these valuable observations carefully and exactly, deserves the severest reprobation of the civilised world.'

This very matter of a scientific observer had troubled me not a little; and now that it had been brought home to me in such a forcible manner, I could not but see that our visitor was right.

'There would be little use, doctor,' I said, 'in denying to you that an expedition of the character stated in this paper is on foot'—he seemed as if preparing to give a shout of joy, but sobered down as I went on—'but as to your offer, I am afraid I cannot accept it off-hand. But if you care to stay with us over night, we'll consult the lady we're responsible to, and let you have an answer by to-morrow morning at the latest.'

'Agreed!' he cried, and there the matter ended for the moment, the doctor immediately changing the subject, and going on to speak of the topics of the day, proving himself a thoroughly agreeable and genial fellow. Cecil, in the meantime, rode over to the Grange to lay his proposal before Edith.

'I see no reason for refusing it,' she replied, promptly. 'But we mustn't accept the man's money. Surely we've enough of our own; and perhaps *he* hasn't too much'—

Cecil hastened to assure her that he was known to have a large private fortune.

'Then it will be the better fun,' she said gleefully, 'to engage him as the ship's doctor at the usual salary, and thus bring him under discipline. And, mind, give him no concession whatever except the choice of a cabin and the liberty to fit it up as he likes.'

After dinner that evening, therefore, I made the doctor

the offer suggested by Edith, and after considerable demur he accepted it, though it was with reluctance that he relinquished the idea of contributing towards the expenses.

'But it's all as it should be,' he said, in the end. 'No doubt I'll do my duty better when I know that instead of a proprietor, as it were, I'm only a hired servant. And you may be sure, Mr Oliphant, that the scientific fittings of this cabin I'm to get will be no disgrace either to the expedition or to the cause in which we shall be engaged.'

'Nor,' interposed Cecil, 'to the reputation of Dr Felix Lorimer.'

The doctor bowed; and, now that he was in reality a member of our party, I told him the whole story from beginning to end (impressing upon him, of course, the necessity of secrecy), and how far our arrangements were completed.

'Admirable!' was his comment, when I had concluded. 'Randolph Torrens is a benefactor of the human race, and his daughter worthy of him. Henceforth, if Mr Cecil will allow it, she has a fervent admirer in Felix Lorimer. My friends, I have a belief that we shall fathom both this mystery and the great and hitherto unconquered mystery of the Pole; and I only wish we were on board the *Aurora*, and on our way to Franz-Josef Land.'

'You may see her to-morrow, if you please,' said I. 'I have just had a letter from Captain Sneddon saying that the alterations are now made, and that she is ready for sea. So we go to Dundee to inspect her before bringing her round to London to fit her up and provision her, and if you care to accompany us you can enter into possession of your cabin at once.'

'But why don't you provision her in Dundee?' he asked.

'Partly because we don't want to cause more remark there than we've already done, and partly to keep the men better in hand than we could at home.'

So on the following day we journeyed to Dundee in company, and found that everything necessary to equip the

Aurora for her fight with the ice had been done. As the doctor enthusiastically remarked, she was absolutely perfect. The cabin he chose was one of three opening from the mess-room, the other two being occupied by my brother and myself. It is unnecessary to say that our *savant* made immediate preparations to utilise his space to the best advantage; and, at least a week before the vessel sailed, the little room was completely fitted up with everything needful in the way of instruments, books, and medicine-chests.

Captain Sneddon had, we found, engaged as chief mate an officer of the name of Norris, who had sailed under him for many years, and who was thoroughly capable of taking command in case of need. A second mate he had not yet obtained. Two engineers, Green (first) and Clements (second), with two stokers, had also been engaged, as also a boatswain, Murray, and the full crew.

Immediately on the arrival of the *Aurora* in the Thames, the work of loading her was begun. Her bunkers, enlarged for the purpose, were filled to the brim with coal, and the precious fuel was also stowed away wherever room could be found for it. Provisions of every kind, from the salted and preserved meat and the pemmican down to the tea, coffee, and cocoa, were daily received and packed systematically below under the captain's personal superintendence. Nothing likely to preserve health was neglected. Antiscorbutic preparations, such as lime and cranberry juice, cloudberry, pickles, horse-radishes, mustard-seed, &c., we carried in considerable quantities. In addition, we had a large stock of dynamite and gunpowder, the most approved blasting and sawing apparatus, and sufficient firearms and ammunition to serve for many years.

Nor were the means of recreation forgotten. Besides a piano, the doctor's violin, and various musical instruments belonging to the men, a magic-lantern and several games were sent on board, and by means of a well-selected library

of two thousand volumes we hoped during the long winter days and nights to keep at bay the demon of *ennui*.

Our boats, built at Dundee, included a mahogany whale-boat, with swivel harpoon-gun, two smaller ones, two light ice-canoes, convertible into sledges, and several india-rubber Halkett boats. We had also six M'Lintock sledges. But our speciality was the steam-launch *Randolph Torrens*, built specially to our order by an eminent firm of Clyde engineers. It was of fifteen horse-power, and was adapted for consuming chemically-prepared alcohol instead of coal. The advantage of this (the idea being the doctor's) was that we could carry about with us a larger amount of fuel, and thus make more extended voyages. The launch was a complete success, and was afterwards of the greatest service to us.

Another speciality was a balloon, and the machinery for manufacturing gas for it.

While these preparations were going on, Edith found relief for her mind by continually dragging her aunt up to London to examine our progress. The elder Miss Torrens naturally objected, but, in spite of her protests, not a week passed without a visit from the fair owner of the vessel, for whom the men soon had a warm admiration. 'She'll bring good-luck to the voyage,' the captain said, and the superstitious sailors actually believed in it. But at last, on the 10th of July, everything was done, and the *Aurora* ready for her cruise to the Northern Seas.





CHAPTER IV.

THE 'AURORA' STARTS.

AT three o'clock on the afternoon of the 12th of July, the *Aurora* cast off from the jetty, and dropped into the centre of the stream.

All arrangements necessary in view of a lengthened absence from England had been made, not only respecting our personal affairs, but also with regard to the safety of the expedition. Should nothing be heard of us for two years, a relief vessel was to be despatched after the second winter; and, to facilitate her inquiries, we were to leave records in prominent places mutually agreed upon. But as it might be impossible to carry out this agreement completely, we promised to take every opportunity of sending home notices of our progress and future prospects by means of such whalers and fishing-vessels as we met.

We had bidden farewell to the many friends who, if uncertain of our destination, had yet no hesitation in wishing us good-fortune and a safe return; and Cecil, on his part, had seen the last of Edith for many months to come. She, the evening before our departure, had got from the captain the names of all on board; and, that morning she had sent down a large box, inscribed 'To be opened on Christmas Day, in, if possible, latitude 83° 25' N. and longitude 48° 5' E.'

'And if we can't do it in the *Aurora*,' said Captain Sneddon, 'we deserve to have had only a herring-boat—it would have been good enough to fail in.'

Edith, her aunt, Mr Smiles, and a few friends of the

officers and men, had come down to see us off, and to wish us the best of luck in the discoveries we hoped to make. How reluctantly the final partings were taken, it is needless to say; but at length the hawsers were cast off, and, after a last embrace and cordial hand-shake, the visitors were put on shore amidst the hearty cheering of the men. Slowly the vessel lengthened the distance between her and the shore; in a minute or two we could not see the fluttering handkerchiefs for the intervening shipping; and then, gently and tardily, as if she were reluctant to leave, the *Aurora* passed through the dock gates and into the Thames. Before evening we were cleaving the waters of the German Ocean on our northward way, and our voyage towards the Pole had begun.

It would have been difficult to analyse the feelings of most of us that night, as we assembled round the mess-room table for the first time.

Here we were, bound on a mission in which the dangers and uncertainties were far out of proportion to the safety, and in which the chances of return were at least as much against us as in our favour. But if there were any for whom that fact was not the greater inducement, we failed to discover them.

It was the captain's idea to take the officers into our confidence as soon as we were at sea, for the reason that if any of them did not care for the voyage they could be set ashore when we touched at Peterhead, as we meant to do to allow the men, most of whose homes were there, to say farewell to their families.

'For if any of the officers don't like our sailing orders,' said Sneddon, 'they must go at once; better work short-handed than have grumblers and fault-finders on board. Why, they'd tell more against us than all the ice in Greenland!'

So the *Aurora*, for the time, was given into the charge of Murray, the boatswain, and the conference began. One of the eight present was the second mate, George Wemyss,

who had been engaged at the last moment. He was an old schoolfellow of ours and an ex-naval officer, who had sent in his papers owing to some quarrel with a superior; and as he had had experience in Arctic work, and was besides a good officer, we were fortunate in having secured him.

I fully explained the origin and purposes of the expedition, not forgetting to mention the probable difficulty of carrying them out, and finally asked each to give his candid opinion of our mission. It lay with themselves, I said, to go or to stay at home; but if they decided to go, we expected that they would honestly and faithfully do their duty.

Wemyss was the first to answer.

'I, for one, am with you to the end,' he said, 'and I'm certain that, if success is to be attained at all, the *Aurora* will do it!'

For he, too, had been seized by the fascination which our vessel seemed to exercise over every one who had any connection with her.

'And I say with Mr Wemyss,' put in Clements, the second engineer, 'that we're sure to succeed; and, further, that with a vessel and crew like this it would be almost a crime not to go on and do our best.'

'These men we can depend on,' whispered the captain to me. 'I'll be surprised if they don't turn out to be of the very stuff that Arctic explorers are made of.'

Norris and Green also signified their approval of our plans, and their willingness to go on with us, though it was more soberly and with less ostentatious enthusiasm than their juniors.

'Then, that being settled,' said Dr Felix Lorimer, 'let us join in a bumper to our captain and the owner's representatives, Messrs Godfrey and Cecil Oliphant; good-luck to our voyage and the accomplishment of its purpose; and, lastly, to the conquest for the first time, and by Englishmen, of the NORTH POLE!'

Glasses having been emptied to this toast, we went on



'I've a letter here from my agent in Dundee, and his news strikes me as rather queer, not to say alarming.'

deck, glad that we had come to an understanding which promised so well for the future.

On the evening of the 14th the *Aurora* steamed into the harbour of Peterhead, having made an exceptionally quick passage, and proved her sea qualities to be of the highest order. Most of the hands went on shore at once, but were ordered to return the first thing in the morning, that we might take advantage of the forenoon tide. Several letters that had arrived for us were brought on board, and one received by the captain appeared to contain unpleasant or unwelcome news. After reading it several times, and scratching his head as if deeply perplexed, he signed to Cecil and me and Dr Lorimer to follow him into his cabin.

'I've a letter here from my agent in Dundee,' he began, when we were seated, 'and his news strikes me as rather queer, not to say alarming. From what he writes I gather there's a rival in the field—that ours isn't the only vessel that sails this year to the Arctic!'

'A rival!' exclaimed Cecil, sceptically. 'Do you mean that there's to be an exciting race to the Pole, to end up with a sanguinary encounter in latitude 90°?'

'Joking aside, this is serious news,' I said. 'What does the agent say, captain?'

'Read the letter,' suggested the doctor.

'Just what I was going to do,' said Sneddon, and then went on:

DUNDEE, 12th July 188—.

MY DEAR SIR—As it may have some bearing on your enterprise, I have thought it my duty to inform you of a curious fact I discovered yesterday by the merest chance. For some time past a whaling-vessel called the *Northern Pharos*—no doubt you know her—that was built at the same time as the *Aurora*, but which, for some reason, did not go to the fishery this season, has been fitting out at the docks. It never transpired, however, for what purpose she was intended, nor where she was bound for, and a few days ago she steamed away without any one being any the wiser. Yesterday, as it happened, I fell into conversation with the late

owner of the *Northern Pharos*, and my surprise may be imagined when I learned the following facts. Early in May a stranger had bought the vessel, and ordered her to be fitted up according to instructions he furnished. The strictest secrecy was observed, and so well that nobody suspected that the *Pharos* was getting ready for a voyage to the Arctic regions. But this is the case, for the man who bought her (whose name I couldn't learn) inadvertently divulged to my informer the information that she was going up 'Spitzbergen way.' Knowing that you would be interested, I ascertained further (for my friend was ready enough to speak now that the vessel had gone) that she was manned by officers and sailors from some English port, and provisioned for three years.

This is all that is known here about the matter, but perhaps you may fall in with her yourself and find out her purpose.

Yours truly,

G. M. THOMPSON.

A minute's silence followed the reading of this letter. Nobody seemed to know what to think of the thunderbolt that had thus fallen amongst us; and while we were trying to make up our minds Sneddon continued: 'That's the letter, and it strikes me there's something in it that's worth considering. With your permission I'll state the various points I see. In the first place, is this *Northern Pharos* (I know the vessel well enough—she's smaller than ours, but perhaps quite as well suited for her purpose)—I say, is she going north merely by chance, or in rivalry, as Mr Cecil hinted, to some other vessel? If the former, why has there been so much quietness about it? It looks queer, to say the least of it, that even the owner's name has never leaked out. Then, as to her sailing date—and it is this point that concerns us more than any other—is it only accidentally, so to speak, that she sails almost on the same day as ourselves? These are three points, gentlemen, that seem to me worth looking into.'

'Then your opinion is that, after all, and speaking seriously, we have a rival in the field, or, rather, on the sea?' asked Cecil, in his usual impetuous way.

'Begging your pardon, Mr Cecil,' replied the captain, 'I gave no such opinion, nor meant to; what I did was only to point out what I thought suggestive facts—nothing else.'

'And your facts *are* suggestive, captain,' I said—'in fact, rather too suggestive to be pleasant. Your agent, I know, is to be trusted, and so we may put every confidence in his information, I suppose. We know, then, that the *Northern Pharos* has been bought by some one unknown and fitted up for Arctic work; that her destination, like ours, is the Spitzbergen seas; and that she has already started. What we have to consider is if it concerns us—if, in fact, it is by chance, or in opposition to us.'

'All that I have to say is,' said Cecil, 'that it's morally impossible that this expedition is a chance one; the whole circumstances, as we know them, are utterly against the theory. Nothing is more plain than that this mysterious owner, like ourselves, had some definite plan which he wished to keep secret from the world.'

'Then, gentlemen,' interposed the captain, 'it must have been rivalry, according to your own suggestion, Mr Godfrey.'

'And that brings us to the question,' I replied, 'as to any one fitting out an expedition in pure opposition—even saying nothing as to how he discovered our purpose.'

Hitherto the doctor had remained silent, but had apparently followed the discussion with interest. Now, however, he spoke.

'It was, I think,' he asked, 'during the first week of May that the paragraph about the expedition appeared in the *Sun*?'

'You are right,' I answered. 'It was on the 4th.'

'Then,' he went on, 'I consider that we have a satisfactory explanation of the mystery at hand. Some Arctic enthusiast—I am glad to say there are still a few such—has seen that paragraph, and either disbelieving or having reason to disbelieve the denial that appeared, he has become fired by an ambition to forestall you in reaching the Pole. If he has

any knowledge at all of what I may call Arcticology, he would naturally turn first to Dundee for a vessel. While there, he may have learned enough of the *Aurora* and her destination to serve his purpose. This done, there is no difficulty in imagining the rest.'

'I see, doctor,' said the captain. 'You may be right; so far as we have the facts, you seem to be. But if you are, what's to be done now?'

'We can do nothing but go on with the expedition according to our plans. But if we should happen to meet our rival, as is probable enough, let us go on board and frankly tell him our mission. If he is agreeable, and circumstances permit, we may join parties; if not, let us go our respective ways—within the Arctic circle there is surely room for two ship's crews! Our life, after all, isn't so long that we need allow any such miserable jealousies to disturb us and injure the cause of science.'

This, in the end, was agreed upon as our plan of campaign if we met the *Northern Pharos*; but, notwithstanding the doctor's theories, there was not one of us who did not retire that night with the feeling that a strange and indefinable air of mystery was hanging over our future movements.

Next morning we left Peterhead, and finally steaming away from the coast of Britain, headed the *Aurora* for northern Norway. It was our intention to call in at Tromsø in Lapland, to obtain dogs, sledges, and other necessities not to be had elsewhere, and also to get, if possible, information as to the state of the ice that year from the whalers who frequent the quiet little town. It would doubtless be as tedious to reader as to author to describe in detail the voyage across the North Sea. From a narrative point of view it was absolutely uninteresting; we had not even a storm worthy of the name to break the monotony; and if the doctor and Cecil and I never tired of standing on deck and watching the sea, it was probably owing more to the novelty of it than to any other reason.

In magnificent weather we crossed the Arctic Circle, and a few days later were among the Lofoden Islands. Here occurred an incident—almost the only one of the passage—that caused some excitement to such of us as knew of the letter the captain had received at Peterhead. We had been steaming lazily northward under the lee of a high, rocky island. Suddenly, while we were below at breakfast, we heard the cry: 'A large steamer in sight!'

Going on deck, we found that we had passed the island, and that, not a mile and a half off, close into another island, was the steamer in question, which had hitherto been hidden from us by the land we had left behind. In a minute the captain had brought his glass to bear upon her. After a long and steady look he significantly motioned us aside.

'It's the *Northern Pharos*!' he said. 'I'm as sure of it as if she belonged to myself. She's the only one of the Dundee fleet besides the *Aurora* that can be in these waters just now; and if that isn't a Dundee-built whaling-steamer I'll acknowledge I never saw one!'

This latter fact being confirmed by Norris, the first mate, and several of the men, our excitement began to rise.

'What's to be done?' I asked.

'Make sure,' replied the captain; 'and then, as the doctor advises, signal her and find out her destination.'

So saying, he gave orders to get up full steam, which was done; and for above five minutes we approached nearer and nearer the strange steamer. But then those on board seemed to become aware of our rapid approach, and long before we were near enough to distinguish her name, she had also increased her speed and disappeared behind one of the many small islands that are studded about those seas.

'Shan't we have a search for her?' inquired Cecil.

'No use,' said Sneddon. 'We should only lose time, and perhaps find a mare's-nest after all. Best get to Tromsø as quickly as we can.'

Next afternoon we reached the rocky island of Fuglø,

without having again sighted the other steamer; and, taking on board a pilot, were guided through a perfect labyrinth of sounds and fiords to the anchorage of Tromsø. The British consul immediately placed his services at our disposal, and through him we were not long in purchasing two dozen dogs and three sledges, such as are used by the Lapps, with sufficient meat for the animals. Better still, he recommended to us a Norwegian harpooner and pilot who wished an engagement. This was Nils Jansen, a man who had been an ice-pilot, and as such had accompanied Arctic expeditions ever since his early youth. Needless to say, we secured him at once, and a thoroughly valuable acquisition he was to prove in the days to come.

Late that evening, as the doctor, Cecil, and I were returning from dining with the consul, we were surprised to see through the fog—of darkness there was none, for we were now in the land of the midnight sun—the lights of a large vessel, apparently anchored at the entrance to the harbour. She had assuredly not been there earlier in the evening; and, actuated by a suspicion we could not put to rest, we ordered the boatmen to row down to her. And there, sure enough, when we arrived under her stern, we saw on a rail under the light of a lamp the name *Northern Pharos*!

'We have her now,' chuckled the doctor as we returned to our ship, on which only one light was shown. 'The morning will verify or disprove my theory, and supply some solution of this perplexing mystery.'

But, unfortunately for Lorimer's reputation as a prophet, the morning did no such thing. These were the words, shouted into my ears by the excited *savant*, which awakened me seven hours later:

'The *Northern Pharos* is gone!'

I jumped up. 'Impossible!' I cried.

'Come and see!'

Throwing on some clothes, I rushed on deck and turned to the entrance of the harbour. One glance showed me that

he was right; neither at the entrance nor within was she to be seen; she had disappeared as completely as if she had vanished into thin air.

'Where can she have gone to?' I asked, in bewilderment.

'Goodness knows!' was the doctor's rueful reply. 'I am half inclined to believe that this *Pharos* is only a phantom sent to plague us—a sort of Arctic Flying Dutchman.'

At this moment our new pilot, Nils Jansen, came on board, and I took occasion to ask him for an explanation.

'The vessel you name left this morning as soon as the commander rose,' he said, speaking in almost perfect English. 'My brother Karl, who is her pilot, brought her up last night late; but this morning when the commander woke he at once said to go down again. I was on board at the time, and he looked over to you with not a pleased face. He is a tall man, with much beard.'

This was practically all the information we could get of the *Pharos*, of the mysterious movements of which the four of us in the secret were never tired of speaking; and we could only hope that the next time we saw her we should be more fortunate in discovering something tangible. Until then it was of no use speculating on what were or might be her aims and reasons.

In the meantime it was agreed that neither the officers nor crew should be told of the vessel; for, as Captain Sneddon said, it was difficult to know how they might receive it. In all likelihood the seamen would find in it some evidence of the supernatural, and their superstitious dreads were capable of leading them into any kind of mischief.

Having received all our purchases on board, and filled up with as much coal as we could carry, we left Tromsö with the good wishes of the kindly inhabitants, and piloted by Nils, passed through the intricate sounds to the open sea. Off Rysö we hailed a whaler going up to the town, and

instructed the pilot to inquire if she had seen a steamer bearing northward.

'No steamer,' was the reply given through Nils; 'only a few whalers and sealing-boats.'

We had hardly expected any other answer; but we were more grateful for the information that the whole of the Barents Sea, from Bear Island to Nova Zembla, was particularly free from ice that year.

'Good news!' said Captain Sneddon, gleefully. 'We'll run over to Zembla in four or five days at the most, leave a record there, and then penetrate as far to the north as the ice allows us. With good-luck we may reach our destination before the autumn has quite begun.'

The captain was right, for on the fourth day out from Tromsø we caught sight of Pervoussmotrennaja Gora, a mountain on the west coast of Nova Zembla, nearly three thousand feet high, which for centuries has been the landmark of every voyager and adventurer in those lonely seas. Ice now became plentiful, and the temperature fell much below freezing-point. But where there was ice there was game in abundance; and seals and auks, with an occasional bear, whom we never got near, afforded fair sport to those who were inclined that way.

We came at length to a spot where we found it almost impossible to proceed, but as the ice-free coast water was visible beyond, steam was got up, and the *Aurora* charged the barrier again and again, until she had forced her way through. Once within the ice-lagoon, we steamed quickly northward along the coast, our object being to make Admiralty Peninsula, one of the points at which it had been agreed we should leave a record. Much ice was met with opposite Matochkin Strait, which divides Zembla into two, and leads into the Kara Sea; but, on the whole, the sea was much freer than Nils Jansen had ever seen it at the same period of the year.

On the 1st of August we anchored in a little bay on the

west side of Admiralty Peninsula, just above latitude 75°. To the west and south there was a water-sky beyond the small amount of ice visible; but to the north-east the pack stretched up to Cape Nassau, and even farther north, while the ice-blink* was particularly well defined.

'No farther in this direction, at anyrate,' said the captain. 'Better land our depôt and record, and get off to the west and then north as long as we have a chance. Dealing with ice, the man that hesitates is lost.'

The prospect on land was not of an inviting description. It rose in a succession of terraces from the coast to a range of low hills, and the ice and snow still lay on many parts of it: where the thaw had taken effect, the grayish-brown earth was seen, covered here and there with clumps of dark-green moss or saxifrage; and over the whole surface were studded isolated masses of rock of all sizes and shapes.

Here, in a cleft between two rocks that could easily be rendered bear- and weather-proof, we chose a place for the depôt of provisions we had decided to make in order to secure our retreat in the event of the loss of the vessel. It consisted of fifteen hundred rations, chiefly of pemmican, and some ammunition. Finally, two records in tin cases were left in a prominent position, with a notice to the first vessel that touched there to forward one of them to the address given, and leave the other where it was.

* The *ice-blink* is a peculiar brightness in the sky caused by the reflection of large masses of ice on the air above them. It appears just above the horizon. A *water-sky* indicates open water in that direction.





CHAPTER V.

WE REACH THE ICE-BARRIER.

ON the 3d of August the *Aurora* left Nova Zembla, and steaming without difficulty through the ice that lay at a distance of twenty-five miles from the coast, reached open water. She was at once headed northward, her fires put out, and the sails hoisted, and henceforth for the next week or so, until the ice-barrier was reached, her cruise was more like a pleasure trip than a hard-working expedition with a definite aim. The following extracts from my journal may be of some interest, as giving a glimpse of the monotony and uneventful character of this part of the voyage :

August 4.—Compelled to lie-to nearly all day, on account of a dense fog. Nothing is more remarkable in those seas than the sudden changes of weather. In the forenoon it may be the brightest sunshine ; by afternoon we may be having a typical Arctic snow-storm ; and in the evening we may be enveloped in a fog worthy of Newfoundland.

August 5.—On the rising of the fog this morning, Norris, from the crow's-nest, reported a brig to the southward. We at once hailed her, and on finding her to be a Norwegian whaler almost full, sent on board a packet of letters to be posted when she reached Hammerfest, and also a present of tobacco and spirits for the captain. Shortly afterwards that officer returned the visit, bringing with him some dried fish and seal's flesh for the dogs ; and we were much amused by his curiosity and persistent efforts to discover our purpose. We parted at noon, after saluting each other by dipping the Norwegian and British flags. No ice in sight. The whaler reported the year a remarkably favourable one.

August 7.—Sea calm, and still no ice visible. Weather good, with the temperature 35° Fahrenheit in the sun. With a slight breeze from the SW. we made fair progress to the north.

August 8.—To-day crossed the seventy-eighth parallel, without so far having observed any signs of the ice barrier, which, according to all accounts, should have been found much farther south. Not unnaturally, we are elated by our exceptionally good-fortune.

August 10.—Owing to a stiff wind, the *Aurora* made good progress yesterday and to-day. For the first time since leaving Nova Zembla we have passed several detached pieces of salt-water ice. Cecil and Nils killed two seals. Wemyss reported a slight ice-blink to the NW., but a water-sky to the north. Owing to the fog that came down at night, and the probable vicinity of ice, steam was got up to be ready for any emergency.

August 11.—Passed through large masses of field-ice in latitude 79° 6'. Temperature so much lower that winter dress was distributed to the men. We are evidently near the dreaded ice-barrier, and our real work is now about to commence.

During the whole of that day (the 11th) we threaded our way through the loose ice which, under the combined influences of wind and waves, had been detached from the pack. Towards evening it became more and more plentiful and difficult to navigate; and by midnight there could not be the least doubt that we had reached the illimitable ice-field that so many of our predecessors had found barring their way to the Pole. On every side of us stretched the white, level surface, only diversified here and there by ridges and hummocks which marked the scenes of violent concussions between opposing floes. But, to our immense gratification, the pack was intersected in every direction by open lanes of water that promised at least a chance of reaching still farther north. For the present, however, we sailed eastwards along the edge of the barrier, there being in that direction less of an ice-blink than in any other.

'We've had good-luck so far,' said the captain, next morning, 'and if we can only escape being beset—and we

should, with so many advantages that those before us never even dreamt of—we can surely find leads, passes, and ice-holes somewhere to allow us northward. It's a well-known fact that the ice is broken up at this time of the year by lanes and ice-holes'——

'Polynias, the Russians call them,' the doctor interposed, 'being sometimes of immense extent.'

'Yes; and with discretion and continued good-luck, there is no reason why we shouldn't find them serve our purpose up to latitude 83°.'

At that moment one of the seamen reported that Mr Wemyss from the crow's-nest had seen open water directly north-east, separated from us by a broad tongue of compact ice. We rushed on deck immediately, and in a few minutes the water beyond the barrier was plainly visible from where we stood. Not the smallest opening, however, was to be seen, and the weather was too settled to admit of any hope of a change taking place sufficient to burst the ice.

'We must charge it!' said Captain Addon, when he had examined it from the mast-head. 'That open water extends as far north as I can see, and we have only to reach it to have a plain course before us again.'

'Is it quite safe, captain?' I asked, looking doubtfully at the immense mass.

'Under ordinary circumstances it might be risky charging such a floe; but situated as we are just now, with every moment precious, I think we *must* risk it. And I wouldn't say so unless I was certain the *Aurora* could stand it.'

Everybody was on deck to see the result of our first conflict with the ice, and as the orders were given to get up full steam and go ahead, I think the heart of each was in his mouth.

The captain himself took the wheel.

'Where does the ice seem weakest?' he asked.

'To starboard a little!' answered Wemyss from above.

‘Will that do?’

‘That will do, sir. Go on!’

With a shock that shook her from stem to stern, and threw down every one on deck who had not held on like grim death, the *Aurora* struck full against the ice; and, rising to it six or seven feet, crashed down upon it with the tremendous power of her iron stem. A second time she rose and came down with crushing force. Then, her impetus exhausted, she settled down amongst the fragments into which she had pounded the brittle ice. In spite of the enormous resistance, the vessel had escaped the least injury, and was as sound as before her attack upon the frozen bank. But as yet that attack was not entirely successful; for, although much had been done, the way into the open water was still blocked.

‘Another charge will do it!’ cried Wemyss, who had remained at his perilous post throughout the whole struggle.

‘Steam astern!’ ordered the captain.

It was done; and, when we had got a little way on, we returned to the attack at a speed of fifteen knots an hour. Gallantly the *Aurora* dashed into the passage she had already made, struck the floe with her whole weight, and, amid the ringing cheers of the crew, split it completely in twain, thus gaining the open water she so much coveted after a struggle as sharp as it was short.

‘Hurrah!’ we shouted in unison.

But our cheering was premature, for the appearance of the ice-hole we had entered proved to be of the most deceptive character. Before we had gone far it began to close in on both sides, until the passage was no more than a thousand yards broad; and by evening we had reached a point where minor leads branched off in every direction. No open water was visible beyond any of them; and, as it is one of the tenets of ice-navigation never to enter even the most promising lane unless one sees where it is to end, the captain was in the deepest perplexity.

'What's to be done?' he asked.

'Take the one nearest our course,' suggested Cecil.

'That won't do—we cannot afford to trust to chance here,' said the doctor. 'Very likely one out of every two of those leads is a *cul-de-sac*; and if you take the wrong one, it may end in the *Aurora* being beset. I suppose that's your idea, captain?'

'That's just it, doctor,' he answered. 'It's only a pity the ice is so level here; if we had a decent berg to get to the top of, as you may have at any time in Baffin Bay, we shouldn't be long in settling our course. There's an ice-sky, but with some trace of vapour above the blink. If we could only get a larger range!'

'The balloon!' I exclaimed, suddenly remembering that this was one of the purposes for which it had been bought.

'The very thing!' shouted the doctor; and the next minute he was energetically directing some of the men to raise from the hold the cases containing the balloon and the machinery for manufacturing the gas. Under his personal superintendence the engineers and Gates were not long in fixing the latter; and by next morning we had a supply of gas sufficient for our purpose, though it wofully diminished our coal. There was much interest on board as the immense bag was gradually inflated, and when everything was at last ready for the ascent, the seamen could hardly restrain themselves from thronging aft to examine it more closely.

When the doctor and I had taken our seats in the car (which could hold four at a stretch) the captain followed, with the half-apologetic remark that he wasn't altogether sure about it, but as some people had eyes in their heads and didn't know a 'pass' from a *cul-de-sac*, he thought he might as well go aloft with us.

Then the word was given to pay out the captive rope, which, having been made for the purpose, was of unusual strength and practically unbreakable. Slowly we rose, and

as we did so the vessel below us gradually lessened in size, while our horizon widened with every foot we ascended. The rope being six hundred feet long, we could get no higher. It was a beautifully clear day, and we saw in every direction the bluish-white ice-fields, intersected by the dark lanes of water, that looked like ink-lines on a sheet of white paper. Through our glasses we closely scanned the view to the north; but none of us could make anything of it but the captain, who, after an exhaustive examination, pointed out as our course a lane we should never have thought of taking. Not only did it seem to lead in a wrong direction, but at the entrance there was scarcely room for the passage of a vessel; but it broadened as it advanced, and led to the only open water that was visible.

'That's our course,' said the captain, 'and I'm bound to say that but for this craft I should no more ha' thought of taking it than of cutting through the ice with a pickaxe.'

By the aid of the windlass we descended without waste of gas, and then the inflated balloon was affixed top and bottom to a part of the poop where it would be out of the way, and be ready for further ascents. This was rendered necessary by the value of our coals, of which no more could be spared for the manufacture of gas. This done, the *Aurora* entered the narrow channel we had chosen, and was soon again winding her way through the ice to the north.

Hitherto the weather had been calm, but now a breeze from the south-west rose, and a fear was expressed that if it continued it might set the pack in motion. That this fear was only too well founded we were soon to discover; for, just as we had reached the ice-hole we had seen from the balloon, it began to narrow more and more under our eyes. Here, too, the nature of the ice changed, and instead of the comparatively level pack we had met so far it was now raised and hilly, as if from the effect of some convulsion. Bergs, mostly of a small size, also became more numerous as we dashed across the polynia at full speed in the hope

of finding a road to the north before the ice closed in. But before long we were again among extensive ice-fields, and although at first we found a broad opening, the lookout from the crow's-nest soon reported that farther progress that way was blocked. With the Ancient Mariner we might have said :

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around :
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound ! . . .

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen :
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

Hither and thither amongst it the *Aurora* darted in the hope of finding another pass, but always without success ; and as the movement of the floes still continued, and a heavy fall of snow had begun, Captain Sneddon decided to anchor her to a berg we noticed in open water, and await the cessation of the ice movements.

'By to-morrow morning, I expect,' he said, 'we'll be able to go on, and although this may have closed the old leads, it must have opened new ones. Anyhow, it'll take something to beat us now that we've got so far.'

But by the next morning, in spite of our skipper's sanguine prophecy, we were enveloped in a dense fog that limited the horizon to twenty yards ; and, worse still, the commotion amongst the bergs went on unabated. Our difficulties, as may be understood, were immensely increased by our limited range of observation, and the knowledge that at any moment we might be beset or nipped did not add to the comfort of the situation. Still, we were all as hopeful as people in ignorance of the future usually are, and none more so than the captain himself.

'Only a passing vexation of spirit,' he said, so that the crew might hear him ; for he knew by experience how a

commander's temperament is reflected in those of his men. 'I've seen hundreds of fogs worse than this, and I've never seen a vessel yet that didn't come out of them all right—not one!'

The fog lifted for a minute or two at noon, and then we saw that we were surrounded on every side by bergs, while the open water was of the smallest dimensions. The captain looked anxious, but said nothing. Then we were again enveloped more closely than ever in the damp, disagreeable vapour, which made everything appear gloomy and unpleasant, and added a thousandfold to the dangers of ice-navigation, already perilous enough.

As the afternoon passed there were no signs of the fog becoming less dense, and when, just before midnight, the creaking and groaning of the ice, which had been quiet for a few hours, told us that it was again in motion, the captain summoned us into his cabin.

'I can't conceal from you,' he commenced, gravely, when we were all assembled except the officer of the watch, 'that we're in the greatest danger. That glimpse we had at mid-day showed me that if the bergs round about once begin to move, we stand a very good chance of being ground to powder. Well, it's no use palavering about it; what's to be done, now that it's commenced, is to take some precautions for our safety. We must get the sledges, boats, and provisions ready, and a certain duty given to each man, else there'll be nothing but confusion' and then followed details, into which it is needless to go. Suffice it to say that every one of us was soon carrying out the instructions given by choosing and allotting the articles necessary in case of the loss of the ship; and, before an hour had passed, we were all, officers and men, assembled on deck ready for the worst.

The noise of the agitated ice became louder every moment, and soon we saw the huge masses of the bergs looming through the fog. The space of open water was narrowing, gradually but surely: there seemed no escape from the fate

that threatened us. Slowly but inexorably the icebergs neared us, and though we steamed now one way and again another to avoid them so long as we had water under us, it was of no avail. They surrounded us on every side. At length we heard a crunch under our bows that told us that the ice was pressing against our devoted vessel. The next moment, we saw to our horror an immense berg within a dozen feet of our starboard, while to port was that to which we had originally been anchored. We were between the two, and the vessel was immovable.

'God help the *Aurora*!' groaned Captain Sneddon. 'Unless that berg is checked, she's lost, and her crew with her!'





CHAPTER VI.

BESSET IN THE FROZEN OCEAN.

A MINUTE or two's suspense followed the captain's declaration. The shocks below still continued, but evidently our stout little vessel withstood them well; at anyrate, we could perceive no immediate ill effects. But all our attention was directed to the huge berg looming above, as if awaiting a favourable chance to crash down and overwhelm us. Nearer and nearer it came, until we could touch it with the long ice-poles which had been served out to us; and still, although so close, we could gain only a general idea of its form and size, so dense did the fog continue.

‘Ready now, men!’ suddenly shouted the captain.

As he spoke, the vessel received the heaviest shock she had yet sustained, and the whole of her stern was raised apparently out of the water. At the same moment the iceberg seemed to give a lurch forward as if to complete our destruction. Perhaps it was the effect of refraction, which in the Arctic regions almost invariably makes things appear worse than they really are; but, refraction or not, all on board thought their last minute had come. Most of the men made a rush for the other side of the vessel, while those who remained at their posts awaited in sickening anxiety that which they were powerless to prevent. But all that happened was the fall of several small pieces of ice, which cut the rigging without doing any further damage. While we were keeping off the berg with our poles (or trying to keep it off,

for we might as well have attempted to move Westminster Abbey) another and still more severe shock was felt. Then—we never knew exactly how it occurred—the *Aurora* was lifted up as if into the air, thrust sideways from between the bergs, and, before we could realise our position, forced by the irresistible pressure of the ice far beyond the danger that had threatened us. How great that danger had been, and how narrow our escape, we did not altogether know until we heard the noise of the two bergs coming in contact, and shuddered to think of our fate had we been between them.

‘Saved!’ I cried.

‘Saved!’ echoed the captain, in a somewhat awed tone, ‘but by the narrowest shave I ever saw during a life of narrow shaves! I tell you, gentlemen, that a minute ago I shouldn’t have given a plug of tobacco for our chances of life, and yet here we are, saved as by a miracle!’

As far as we could make out, we had been jammed by the ice behind us between two floes which had then become one mass; and as there was no appearance of any bergs through the fog, we felt somewhat easier than before. After the experience we had just undergone, the thought that we might be beset by the ice did not trouble us much; perhaps we reckoned pretty confidently on our ability to free ourselves. But all surmises as to our position and chances had to remain unsettled until the lifting of the fog, of which, for the next thirty hours, there was no appearance. During that time a thorough investigation was made of the ship, the screw-propeller and rudder being found to be undamaged; while the only injury, easily remedied by the carpenter, was to several of the timbers.

At last the fog lifted as suddenly as it had fallen, and then we saw the extent of our misfortune. The *Aurora* was, as we had imagined, in the centre of a large and level floe, which, surrounded on every side as it was by icebergs, had the appearance of a plateau in the midst of a range of

mountains. Of the bergs we counted eleven from the deck, and beyond them the ice resembled nothing more than a hilly country looked at from some high peak. No open water except a few detached pools was visible anywhere, even from the top of the highest berg, some ninety feet above the sea level.

Captain Sneddon looked at this scene long and earnestly, while we awaited his report with an anxiety we could hardly conceal.

'Beset!' was all he said when he did speak; but the tone of his voice told us more than the one word conveyed.

'Without hope?' I inquired.

'So long as the vessel's safe there's hope,' he replied, 'and the ice may break at any moment; but when I've said that, I can't say any more. It's that ring of bergs more than anything else that's dispiriting. The chances are, sir—and it's no use shirking it—that we're beset for the winter.'

'Just as the Austrian expedition's vessel *Tegetthoff* was in 1872,' interposed the doctor. '*She* never got free again.'

We went off to do our duties more discouraged than we had been since starting, for the thought of wintering where we were was absolutely intolerable. A balloon ascent did not raise our spirits appreciably, as the open lanes we did see were all too distant, and seemed, besides, to lead to nowhere in particular. Daily ascents thereafter were made whenever the weather permitted, and the amusement—for it was little else—helped to keep the men in good spirits.

At dinner that day, however, hope resumed her sway. Dr Felix Lorimer rushed in from his laboratory in a state of the greatest excitement.

'Good news!' he shouted. 'We're drifting fast to the north—have gone ten miles since morning. We may reach our destination after all!'

'Ten miles!' repeated the captain. 'Are you sure, doctor?'

'Certain!' he replied. 'There's no room for mistake,

and, what's better, it's almost as due north as it can be—just the direction we wish to go.'

'What are our bearings?' I asked.

'We crossed the eighty-first parallel—I had no idea we had penetrated so far—about mid-day; the longitude is $47^{\circ} 30'$, or a minute or two less; and if we go on in this way there's no reason why we shouldn't reach the winter quarters before October.'

'It all depends on the wind,' said the captain. 'It's from the south just now, and from the surface the bergs offer to it we naturally go fast. But what about a change?'

'We'll wait till it happens, my friend,' said the doctor, who was too delighted by his discovery to take heed of contrary probabilities.

The wind did not change, nor the drifting cease, as the observations taken by Lorimer whenever there was an opportunity proved. Steadily, if slowly, were we carried as passengers towards the north. We had occasional fogs, but otherwise our life on board was pleasant and happy, in spite of the extreme cold. The sun set for the first time during the last week of August, and thenceforth the nights became gradually longer, and the darkness more intense. But atmospheric phenomena, such as the luminous arcs of parhelia or mock suns, were of almost daily occurrence; and they were invariably followed by snow-storms, some of them of considerable duration. During all the time the doctor, sometimes assisted by Cecil (but oftener not), was absorbed in his scientific labours.

There being little work for the men, amusements were at once devised. Our first step was to make the floe—Oliphant Floe, they christened it—as level as artificial means could. At the southern end, upon some young ice that had formed over an ice-pool, a skating-rink was made, and the rest of it converted into a field for various sports, of which football was the men's favourite. It did not matter that, notwithstanding our efforts, it was *rather* rough—

that only added to the enjoyment. This done, an ice-house was built for the accommodation of the dogs, whom we found to be decidedly inconvenient on deck. It was a great success, the only drawback being that the hardy Laplanders preferred to sleep on the top of it instead of inside! Then a road was made for the daily exercise of the animals, and the training of them to draw the sledges. After crossing the floe, this road wound round the largest of the bergs, ascended a pretty steep hill, descended on the other side to the back of another berg, and finally re-entered the floe at the western end. Sometimes, under the tuition of Nils Jansen, we dashed round this 'drive' in the Lapp sledge drawn by four dogs; at other times we trained the whole pack to draw one of the heavy M'Clintock sledges loaded as for an expedition.

The dogs themselves, which had been half-wild at first, soon became quite tame and civilised under the petting of the sailors. Konig (the king-dog of the pack) was the favourite aft, on account of his intelligence and pluck; but the men had taken an especial fancy to two brothers, to whom they gave the names of Paradise Lost and Paradise Found, the former having lost his tail in some youthful scrimmage, while the latter had a particularly bushy one. Two other animals, the ugliest but perhaps the hardest-working ones we had, clung affectionately to Cecil, who suggestively named them Cleopatra and Antony.

The frozen ocean was not so destitute of animal life as one might imagine. Birds passed over us almost continually; seals frequented every open pool of water near us, and afforded good sport; and hardly a day passed without a visit from one bear or another, probably attracted by the smell of our cooking. Now and again we returned their courtesy by shooting them; more often they succeeded in making their escape. On one occasion a somewhat ludicrous adventure was the result of one of these visits. About twenty of the men were engaged on the floe at

their favourite game of football, which, be it understood, they played with considerably less science than gusto. In fact, as long as they got a kick at all, it did not matter where the ball went to; if it were only kicked they were quite well pleased! This time Gates, our stoker and blacksmith, the tallest and strongest man on board, saw the ball coming towards him, and taking a run, he gave it such a tremendous kick that it passed over the heads of some of the players, and went merrily along the floe until it was stopped by an iceberg.

'Well done, Gates!' shouted the others; and a rush was being made for the spot, when, to everybody's surprise, a she-bear coolly appeared from behind a point of the berg, and began to sniff at the ball.

Not one of the sailors was armed, but several of them immediately rushed off to the vessel for rifles; while the others, seeing that the bear made no attempt to attack them, remained at a safe distance watching her as she played with the football as a kitten plays with a spool. While she was thus enjoying herself, apparently oblivious of the men's presence, Nils Jansen and I, on a sledge drawn by four dogs, dashed round the berg upon the scene. The dogs, the moment they saw the animal, swerved off the path to attack her; and as both of us were also unarmed, I did not feel exactly confident of the result of their hotheadedness. Nils, however, seemed to know what he was about. 'It's quite right,' he said; and, when we were near enough, he slipped the knot that held together the traces. The sledge came to a standstill, and the freed dogs, with Konig at their head, boldly rushed upon Madame Bruin. She, on her part, left the ball to itself and prepared to receive them. Separating as they approached, they attacked her on each side in such a manner that the frantic animal was unable to reach them. In this way was the quarry held until the firearms were brought, when a couple of explosive bullets put an end to her existence.



The bear played with the football as a kitten plays with a spool.



CHAPTER VII.

LATITUDE $83^{\circ} 25'$.

SO the days passed, uneventfully and not unpleasantly, in sport, work, and play; and all the while we were drifting steadily on our route to the north. Curiously enough, the temperature as we advanced rose rather than fell; and, perhaps as a consequence, the fogs were of much more frequent occurrence than during August. One result of this was that, as correct observations could not be taken, we were for considerable periods in ignorance of our exact whereabouts. But as long as we drifted northwards—and from the steady way we did so the doctor presumed that we were under the influence of some ocean current—we never grumbled at whatever progress we made.

But, as is invariably the case, there were one or two serious drawbacks to our pleasure. In the first week of September the ice-commotion of which we had already had such a vivid experience recommenced; and from that time onwards we had seldom quietness for two consecutive days. More than once the *Aurora* was so severely nipped that, in anticipation of her break-up, we were ready to abandon her. One awful night—I think it was the 10th of September—those who passed through it will never forget. The shocks commenced early in the evening, while there was still enough light to make out through the fog objects at no great distance; and the first indication we had of our imminent peril was the upheaval of part of Oliphant Floe. The dogs were at once brought on board, and preparations made for

our safety in case of the loss of the vessel. All night we could hear the dull, deep sound of the moving ice, alternated now and again with long-drawn moans as if from distressed spirits in purgatory; level floes were in one moment broken up and converted into chaotic masses, and on every side appeared fissures and abysses through which the dark water could be seen. Just before midnight the agitation seemed to culminate, and then we heard several terrible crashes, while the *Aurora* was tossed about as if in a storm.

'Some big change,' said the captain, grimly, 'that'll be a surprise to us when we discover what it is.'

So violent were the shocks, and so severe was the pressure the vessel had to withstand, that it is a marvel she escaped being smashed into matchwood. Every moment, indeed, we expected her to go; and that she did not, says much for the system on which she was built, and also for the way in which she was strengthened and packed.

At last the motion ceased, and we could again breathe freely. When the fog lightened, as it generally did for an hour or two in the middle of the day, we saw the cause of the crashes we had heard at midnight. Of the eleven icebergs that had surrounded us, four had succumbed to the attacks made upon them, and not a trace of them was to be seen. In their place, and all around the ship except for a few yards on one side, was a chaos of thrown-up ice of every shape; and in the midst of it was the *Aurora*, with her chances of ultimate escape plainly lessened by the work of that one night.

In this way sped the days and the weeks; and we were all becoming a little tired of the monotony of the fog and the danger of the ice-pressures, when we were lifted into the seventh heaven of delight by a clear day. It was not the sight of the sun that delighted us, nor the liberty of wandering about without the fear of being lost; but the mere fact that the doctor was enabled to take a meridian observation which fixed our exact position. For the result of it was that we found that we had reached a higher latitude

than any former navigator in those seas, if we except the voyage of which Randolph Torrens had spoken, and of which as yet we knew nothing. We found 82° 53' 25" to be the precise latitude; and as Dr Lorimer announced the figures three hearty cheers were given by the whole ship's company, the Union Jack was at once hoisted, and our little swivel fired in honour of the achievement. Then grog was served out to the men, while we celebrated the occasion, aft by opening a bottle or two of our precious champagne.

'We have beaten Parry,' cried the doctor enthusiastically, 'and now there's no reason why the North Pole itself shouldn't succumb to our prowess! To the conquest of the North Pole!'

'Ice permitting,' interposed the captain, somewhat grimly. 'Don't forget, doctor, that we're in the power of what *you* once called the most merciless enemy of man.'

'Bah, captain!' replied the doctor, scornfully. 'Fortune has favoured us so far, and I thank Heaven I am sanguine enough to trust that she won't desert us now that we're within a degree of our first destination, and only seven from the Pole!'

After this, what mattered it to us that the fog settled down as densely as ever—if possible, more so? We were content to wait; hope and the certainty of ultimate success made everything bright and rosy to our eyes; and even the knowledge of the plight of our vessel could not appreciably damp our spirits. By some means or other, surely, we should get her free when the time came.

Quite suddenly, on September 14th, the ice-pressures stopped, and that afternoon we were electrified by the doctor's information that, as far as he could ascertain, we had ceased drifting.

'Ceased drifting!' we repeated, mechanically, when he told us, for the fact was difficult to realise.

'I'm certain of it,' he answered, 'and from that I conclude we're in the vicinity of land. By an approximate calculation

we ought to be about latitude 83° 20'—in a word, almost at our destination! If it weren't for this confounded fog, we should be sure in a couple of minutes; as it is—with a groan—'I suppose we must exercise patience, a quality in which I was always singularly deficient!'

'Couldn't we find out where we are by any means at all?' I asked.

'Fogs are things that can't be managed like a ship,' replied the captain. 'There they are, and there they remain as long's they like. And all you can do is to lie-to and swear, if inclined that way, and, when they do go off, make up for lost time. And in this case we must do the same!'

'And what if we drift out of our course?' asked the doctor.

'In your own words, we'll wait till that happens,' replied the captain, quietly.

'A good retort! But I don't think we need do that either. Why not make use of the balloon again?'

'In this fog!' I said. 'Surely, doctor, you must be crazy!'

'Wait a minute. It's a well-known fact that these Arctic fogs cling closely to the ice, and men ascending a few hundred feet have found the air quite clear. Thus an ascent at the present time is not only an interesting scientific experiment, but may also show us where we really are.'

'Then by all means let us make it!' I cried.

And so the preparations were at once made.

It was found that owing to the damp the balloon was so much heavier that it would only rise with three persons; and accordingly Dr Lorimer, the captain, and I were the aerial passengers on this occasion. And a thoroughly disagreeable experience it was, too, as we rose slowly through the moist air.

But the doctor was right. When we had ascended about two hundred feet the fog began to lighten, and at five hundred there was scarcely any humidity in the air. The

sun was obscured by black clouds; below us was the uniform surface of the fog, resembling an immense level plain of snow, unbroken by a single excrescence. But before the balloon had reached its greatest altitude we were startled by an exclamation from the captain.

'Look there!' he cried. 'Towards the east. *Land and a mountainous coast!*'

From our positions in the car the doctor and I had been naturally looking towards the north, where there was a huge bank of fog. Now, as the captain spoke, we turned our eyes to the east, and this is what we saw: There was no fog, and not more than four miles off was a coast-line lying north-west and south-east, broken up by many inlets, and backed by mountains of a great height, the dark sides of which seemed to be entirely free from snow. And close in by the shore was a *broad belt of open water*, extending north as far as we could see.

'The land mentioned by Randolph Torrens!' said the doctor, after we had looked at it for many minutes. 'It must be! Captain Sneddon! Oliphant! our expedition has succeeded!'

But the captain had been paying less attention to the land than to what was to be seen on this side of it. Between our position and the open coast-water the fog hid everything except a narrow stretch of ice bordering the water; but this, we saw, was broken up by many leads.

'We can do nothing until the fog lifts,' he said in reply to the doctor, 'and then we'll see if we *have* succeeded. Let us get down.'

We gave the signal, and in five minutes were telling our story to the others. I need say nothing of the excitement caused on board by our announcement, nor of the impatience with which we awaited the lifting of the fog: these may be imagined by all who have had an object within sight, and yet for a time out of reach. Preparations for an attempt to free the *Aurora* were made at once; and when, next day, the fog

was reported to be considerably lighter, everything was ready for the venture. Before mid-day a slight breeze from the land, aided by a strong sun, had effectively cleared the air; and then we beheld, not three hundred yards from us, a broad and open pass apparently communicating with the coast-water.

'We shall do it!' cried the doctor, after one glance. 'If we aren't in that opening before evening, I'll forfeit my reputation for veracity!'

'Then I'll leave it to you,' replied Captain Sneddon, 'for I confess I don't see how it *is* to be done.'

The doctor only smiled, and immediately set to work, aided by many willing volunteers. First, he carefully surveyed and examined the ice between the vessel and the lead; and, at a point which he indicated after much measuring and calculation, the men bored a hole into the heart of an ice-hillock. Then, when that was ready, a specially prepared dynamite cartridge of more than ordinary explosive power was placed within it, affixed to which was a slender wire communicating with a powerful electric battery on deck.

'You don't mean to say, doctor, you intend to free us through *that*?' asked the captain, a little scornfully.

'Unless the *Aurora* is more firmly fixed than I imagine, I'll be surprised if she isn't freed through that,' was his answer.

The captain shrugged his shoulders; while Lorimer, after making sure that all were on board, and that steam had been got up and everything prepared, deftly attached the coil to the machine.

'Ready?' he asked.

The reply was affirmative.

'Then look out, and don't lose your heads at the moment you need them most,' he said, giving the handle a sharp turn.

Before we had time to be prepared, so to speak, the mine had exploded with tremendous effect. Hardly had the doctor spoken before we heard a deep, dull sound as of distant

thunder, and at the same moment the ice-surface seemed to be heaved up, throwing out a volume of dense white smoke. Through this we caught a glimpse of masses of ice in the process of being hurled through the air. Almost simultaneously we experienced a shock that went through every timber in the vessel; and, as if in irresolution, she swayed to and fro for a little before she finally subsided. In a second it was all over; fore and aft of the *Aurora* we saw open water, and she herself was again in her element. The doctor had calculated so truly, that the ice had split directly under the ship, and now our course was open to us if we could only use it.

'Forward at full-speed!' shouted the doctor.

The chief engineer obeyed, and the *Aurora* dashed forward as if for her life. In a moment she had passed through the newly-formed lead, and just in time; for hardly had she done so than it was seen to be closing in.

'Hurrah! We have done it, thanks to dynamite and electricity!' cried Dr Felix Lorimer, enthusiastically.

'And thanks to you, too, doctor,' said the captain, in a tone of genuine admiration; and at his call we gave a round of cheers, again and again repeated, in honour of our plucky liberator.

Ten minutes thereafter the *Aurora* was cleaving the open coast-water of Torrens Land (as with one consent we christened the new territory, pre-supposing it to have no name), and with mixed feelings we gazed at its mountains and valleys, its ice-covered shores and its glaciers. At noon the doctor succeeded in getting an observation that placed us some thirty-one miles *north* of the position of the 'land-locked bay' as given by Randolph Torrens. We headed for it, of course, steaming close in to the coast; and late in the afternoon we reached an inlet corresponding to the description, though there was half a minute or so of variance as regards longitude—explainable, no doubt, by the difference in the instruments of that day and this.

Those who were in the secret could hardly restrain them-

selves as we steamed into this bay, which, except at the narrow entrance, was completely encircled by land and free from ice. Even the crew, who could not but suspect that something was in the wind, were all on the tiptoes of expectation. Cecil was the first to make a discovery. On the starboard side there were high, black cliffs standing back from the shore, and there he pointed out something—we could not distinguish what—rising out of the snow or ice.

‘Seems to me like a flagstaff,’ said Captain Sneddon.

By this time a boat had been lowered to convey us ashore, and in five minutes we had landed in this new country—a *terra incognita* so far as the civilised world was concerned. In another we had found that, as the captain had supposed, it was indeed a flagstaff we had seen from the deck. Pick-axes and shovels had been brought with us, and eagerly we dug away the accumulated snow of years until at last we had laid bare a cairn of stones surrounded by detached pieces of wood and other debris. And there, when with difficulty we had broken up the frozen mass, we discovered a bottle containing a paper—the solution, we hoped, of the mystery surrounding Randolph Torrens’s voyage to this spot.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE ERECTION OF FORT LORIMER.

IT was Nils Jansen, it should be mentioned, who unearthed the bottle and handed it to the captain. He, after a glance at it, transferred it to me. With a stroke of my shovel I knocked off the head, and out dropped a paper yellow with age, but otherwise in a good state of preservation. After running my eyes over it, and seeing that it was miserably short and contained nothing to be kept secret, I read it aloud to those around me, whose suspense was naturally great. It was as follows :

In this bay, called Weymouth Harbour ($83^{\circ} 25' N.$ lat., and $48^{\circ} 5' E.$ long.), the crew of the steam-brig *Weymouth* wintered 1855-56, after having discovered this continent, and explored it seventy miles to the north and also inland. Eight of the ship's company have died, and, short-handed as we are, there is little prospect of arriving safely in England, for which we sail to-day. We leave this in attestation of our claims as discoverers of the land, and of having penetrated farther to the north than any previous navigators.

Signed in the name of Messrs Randolph Torrens and P. E. Stafford, owners,

THOMAS THOMSON, Captain.

August 17, 1856.

This was all : and as I finished reading the document that for thirty years had remained buried under that cairn, and that told us so little, I seemed to see the whole scene—the vessel ready to sail, the boat lying off shore, and the daring adventurers placing their record where we were to find it so many years afterwards. But I was recalled to the

present by my companions' expressions of disappointment that, whatever other merits the paper might have, it gave no key to Randolph Torrens's reasons for despatching this expedition to the land he had discovered.

'There's nothing new in it except the name of the vessel,' said the doctor; 'and if we ever do solve this mystery—if mystery it is—it strikes me it must be by the merest chance. The question is, what are we to do now?'

'Follow out our instructions by searching to the north-east,' was my prompt reply. 'Then, if that is thoroughly done by next summer, push on as far north as we can get—if possible, to the North Pole.'

'And winter here, I suppose,' put in Cecil. 'By the way, where are "the extensive coalfields" Torrens spoke of.'

To settle this, and to become somewhat acquainted with the topography of Weymouth Harbour, a survey party was immediately organised. Several men were left at the cairn to remove the ice and snow around, in the forlorn hope of finding more relics; but it may be as well to say at once that they only succeeded in laying bare the remains of a boat and several pieces of metal. The rest of the company separated to explore the bay, which was about two miles long and a little above one mile at its broadest part. Why it was not perpetually frozen, as from its situation one would expect, we soon discovered, for at its upper end it received the waters of a considerable stream. Except here, where a valley appeared to strike off in a north-easterly direction, it was completely surrounded by mountains of a great height. One peak we saw in the distance could not have been less than eight thousand feet high.

But before we had observed all this, the doctor had fixed the position of the 'coalfields.' He had gone forward to examine the black cliffs that stood a little behind the cairn, and had hardly reached their base when a shout from him brought us to his side.

'The coal!' he cried. 'These cliffs are of coal, equal by its

look to the best Scotch. Enough here above-ground to last us a thousand years, and no doubt as much more under! By the aid of a dynamite cartridge we shall get enough to serve us all winter, and make us as happy as if this land were still as bountiful and warm as it must have been hundreds of centuries ago, before this coal could have been formed.'

A few hours later, when the bay had been completely surveyed, we held a council in the mess-room; and then I formally assumed command instead of Captain Sneddon, who would on no account act as leader unless when afloat.

'Now, gentlemen,' I said, when we had gone through this formality, 'here we are at our destination, in a latitude higher than has ever been reached, save by our predecessors in exploring this land.* Here we shall remain until next year, using this spot as our base of operations for the various excursions we shall make. As our stay may be of seven or eight months, it is our duty to make the men as comfortable as we can. It is generally admitted, I believe—the doctor will correct me if I am wrong—that the Arctic winter may be more healthily spent on shore than within the narrow dimensions of a ship, if it is at all possible.'

'Quite right,' assented Dr Lorimer.

'And so,' I continued, 'I think it would be a good plan to construct during the next month a building capable of accommodating us all, and in it to spend the winter. I think it can be done. What do you say to the idea?'

The captain was the first to answer.

'I'll admit a vessel's not exactly the place to spend four or five idle months on end in,' he said; 'but it's a question if we could build a house which would. And, after all, others have managed with ships—in fact, most Arctic explorers—and why shouldn't we?'

* At that time, of course, we did not know that Lieutenant Lockwood, of the United States expedition under Greely, had reached latitude 83° 24' on the Greenland coast (1882), thus having gained, next to us, the most northerly point.

'But if such a house could be built, captain,' I replied, 'it would be better to do so?'

'Like enough,' he said, but in a tone that told me he did not altogether like the project. Probably his professional vanity was touched.

'But how are we to build the place?' asked Cecil. 'Where is the material, &c., to come from?'

'It's ready to hand,' answered the doctor. 'You remember that in 1869 the crew of the *Hansa*, off East Greenland, built a house of coal. We can do the same on a larger scale, for we have an inexhaustible supply of material. With your permission I will draw out a plan for the building, and undertake the superintendence of it; and I'm certain we can raise a Winter Palace that will be a credit to us and to our northern position!'

This, in the end, as was usually the case with the doctor's projects, was unanimously agreed to; and after we had discussed the details with the proverbial enthusiasm of amateurs, it was left to Lorimer, with full powers to do as he liked.

He was not long in making a beginning. In the first place, a mine was exploded in one of the cliffs, and a few hundred tons of coal got ready for the building. Then a level spot was selected, well sheltered on all sides, the snow removed, and the foundations laid in the solid rock. Cement was easily obtained by filling up the joints between the pieces of coal with dry snow, and then pouring water over it; and in five minutes we had a solid mass, in which nothing less than superhuman efforts could have driven a hole. In a few days the walls began to rise, and we saw that the building was to be of goodly dimensions. The floor was composed of the uniform-sized coal bricks used on board, over which was laid a covering of felt, that did duty for a carpet. The inside walls were also lined with this article. The roof was of timber and coal; and in the centre of the whole the scientific architect *would* insist on having an ornamental

tower of a somewhat imposing appearance, 'for the purpose,' he said, 'of giving a finish to Fort Lorimer,' as we had decided to call it in his honour. There were fourteen windows altogether, made of transparent sheets of ice in the Greenland fashion, through which the light made at least an attempt to enter.

But long before the building had reached this stage of completion I had departed from Weymouth Harbour in the steam-launch on a voyage of discovery to the north. I was accompanied by Cecil, Clements, the two stokers, and Nils Jansen. The coast trended north-west, and was almost unbroken for nearly twenty miles; but after that we were conscious of a strong current, and soon came upon what was either the estuary of a river or an inlet.

'Something to investigate here,' said Cecil. 'Surely there can't be a river in these regions so large as to cause this current, can there? It hasn't the least appearance of a strait either.'

The opening ran almost directly north-east, narrowing as we advanced, while on both shores the cliffs were of a stupendous height. About ten miles up we espied on the left-hand side a distant range of mountains higher than we had yet seen; and, almost directly in front, two noble peaks that seemed to be quite detached and to stand alone. These were called Mounts Torrens and Stafford, in honour of the pioneer explorers of the land; the range of mountains we named the Arctic Alps; while the inlet or strait itself was christened for the time being Oliphant Inlet. As it was evident that it extended much farther, and our time was limited, we reluctantly decided to devote ourselves at present to the delineation of the coast-line, and to resume its exploration in the following year. So we returned to the entrance, and then continued our voyage northward to a cape we saw in the distance, and which we called Cape Thomson. Behind this was an island—Sneddon Island—and opposite to it a broad glacier, to which we gave the name of our engineer,

Clements. Beyond, the coast extended in an unbroken line to the horizon ; but as the young ice was already beginning to form, it would not have been safe to penetrate farther, and so the launch's prow was turned homewards.

In three days we reached the harbour, but found the entrance blocked by young ice, through which it was with difficulty we could force our way. When at length we were inside, the scene that met our eyes made us open these organs very wide indeed. The *Aurora* lay completely dismantled in the middle of the bay, looking as forlorn and desolate as if she had been deserted for good. On shore a village appeared to have arisen as if by magic. In the centre of a wide enclosure marked out by a snow stockade stood Fort Lorimer, the Union Jack flying from its tower, and smoke issuing from each of its eight chimneys. On one side of it, connected by a covered-in passage, was an observatory and another hut (the magazine, as we afterwards found) ; and on the opposite, several storehouses and the quarters of the dogs. Against the outer walls of all the buildings snow and ice had been piled up for the sake of warmth ; and the whole place, looking at it from the harbour, had a strange and yet home-like appearance.

'Dr Felix Lorimer has eclipsed himself !' exclaimed Cecil. 'If it is only as cosy inside as it appears from here, we shall be in clover all winter, and no mistake.'

Just as he spoke, those on shore seemed to become aware of our arrival, and by the time we landed they were thronging down to meet us, the doctor foremost amongst them.

'Isn't my fort a credit to me ?' he asked, when the greetings were over. 'Here it is, all ready for our four months and a half of winter, occupied by the crew of the *Aurora*, and only awaiting the formal blessing of the commander to complete the business.'

'It is indeed, doctor,' I answered. 'But do the honours at once, if you love us, for we are dying to see the interior.'

He led the way up a broad path made of beaten snow



Just as he spoke, those on shore seemed to become aware of our arrival, and by the time we landed they were thronging down to meet us, the doctor foremost amongst them.

covered with sand to the entrance porch, the door of which had been transferred from the vessel. Entering, we found that we were in a corridor running the whole length of the building. From this all the rooms were reached. The centre was occupied by the men's quarters—two large apartments each fifty feet by twenty, divided by a curtain, and heated by two stoves apiece. Round them were placed the double sleeping-bunks. As we entered we were conscious of a general feeling of warmth that I knew could not come from the stoves alone. I turned to the doctor for an explanation.

'A well-perfected system of hot-air flues is responsible for this,' he said; 'and it is of such use that the temperature in any part of the house need never fall below freezing-point, even in the most severe weather. I intend also to introduce gas for lighting purposes, which will add further to the heat, but as yet I have had no time.'

Adjoining the men's rooms on one side were the cook's galley, the room for washing and drying clothes, and the bath-tubs—the latter so situated that this indispensable aid to health could be taken advantage of at any time with comfort. Then, at the end of the fort, came the officers' living-room, out of which opened six small cabins, occupied by the captain, Cecil, the two mates, the first engineer, and myself. In mine I found all my possessions arranged just as they had been on board ship, the walls hung with my pictures and photographs, and alongside my bunk the safe containing the official books and papers of the expedition.

On the other side were the doctor's laboratory and workshop, his and Clements' cabins, the condensing-room, and the library. As I have mentioned, a covered way led from this part to the observatory outside.

Place tables, chairs, benches, stools, cupboards, bearskin rugs, and other articles of furniture in their places; ornament the walls with pictures, models, and arms; and you may imagine that we were not altogether to be pitied in the

prospect that lay before us. Comfort and health, at any-rate, had been insured for us by the doctor's efforts; and altogether we had every reason to be highly delighted with his work.

That evening we celebrated our occupancy of Fort Lorimer by a grand entertainment in the 'foc's'le,' as the men called their quarters. The two rooms were converted into one by the withdrawal of the curtain, a temporary platform was erected at one end, and our piano (with Cecil as performer) placed upon it. Song and recitation followed each other fast and furiously; the doctor played operatic selections on his violin, and Cecil popular airs on the piano; and one by one volunteers came forward, until we became amazed at the amount of recreative talent amongst the crew. We ended up by clearing the hall and dancing until early in the morning; and although the want of partners of the gentler sex may have been felt by us, the men—bless their hearts!—got on quite as well with their shipmates.

'We must form a dramatic company,' said Cecil, with enthusiasm; and, aided by the indefatigable doctor, he immediately set about doing so, the result being that we had soon another help to relieve the tedium of the long Arctic night that was approaching.

Hitherto we had seen little animal life, but about this time one of the sailors was chased from the head of the bay to the fort by two bears, both of whom we succeeded in killing. Herds of musk-oxen were also noticed more than once in the valley that struck north-east. This, amongst other reasons—the principal being that this seemed most likely to be the direction indicated by Randolph Torrens '*towards the mountains which will be seen in the distance*'—determined me to utilise the few days of light that still remained by a sledge-excursion that way. So the sledges were prepared, the dogs got into training, the men chosen, and all the necessary preparations made with the greatest possible despatch.



CHAPTER IX.

THE SLEDGE EXCURSION—FURTHER TRACES OF THE 'NORTHERN PHAROS.'

GOOD-BYE, Oliphant! Take good care of yourself and the men, and come back as soon as you can with some tangible proof that you've been away.'

The doctor was the speaker, and these were the last words I heard as I left Fort Lorimer to commence the sledge-excursion into the interior of Torrens Land. The rest of the party were in advance. I had remained behind a few minutes to give the last instructions to Lorimer and the captain in case of any mishap to me, when the former would take command and conduct the expedition as might seem expedient.

I was not long in overtaking the others, who were slowly advancing over the frozen bay to its eastern end. There were eight altogether, including myself—Cecil, Wemyss, Gates the stoker, Nils Jansen, and three sailors named Pennell, Forbes, and Grindlay, making up the party. Of these, four at a time assisted the dogs to draw the M'Clintock sledge, which was so heavily laden with necessaries that the dogs alone could scarcely have moved it, even over the comparatively smooth ice of the bay. But when we reached land the difficulties increased a thousandfold. Although much snow had fallen during the past few days, the way was so rough and rocky that occasionally it took the full strength of the party, men and dogs combined, to advance it a foot. Add to this that the temperature was four or five degrees below zero (Fahr.),

and you may understand that Arctic sledge travelling is no pleasant recreation, but the hardest work one can imagine. To the large sledge, I should mention, was affixed one of the smaller Lapland sleds, but for the most part we had no occasion to use it.

When we halted that night, only six miles from the fort, we could already realise some of the disadvantages of autumn journeying. In the first place, we had only eight hours of partial light by which to work when we started, and this decreased day by day as the sun's altitude lessened, until, before our return, it had disappeared completely. Again, the weather was almost certain to be against us, snow at this period of the year falling continually; and such ice as had been formed was of the most treacherous description. The utmost caution was thus necessary to prevent the sledge breaking through when crossing a frozen pool or stream, and also to prevent frost-bite, the most insidious as well as the most dreaded (save scurvy) of Arctic diseases.

At night we had only a thin tent to protect us from the intense cold. Packing, unpacking, eating, and camping had all to be done in total darkness; and as we lay in our sleeping-bags on the hard ground, trying to forget our manifold discomforts in slumber, we could not help thinking in envy of the cosy bunks and well-lit rooms of Fort Lorimer. Here, fire of any kind was impossible, and our cooking had to be done by means of a spirit-lamp. But in spite of all drawbacks I never heard a murmur of dissatisfaction, and the cheerfulness and good spirits of all, added to a genuine desire to do as much as possible, made even hardships bearable, and discomfort seem a mere incident.

On the second day we were more fortunate, being able to travel several miles with comparative speed upon the frozen surface of the stream that flowed into Weymouth Harbour. That afternoon a herd of musk-oxen was descried on the side of the valley, and Cecil and I, taking our rifles, started in pursuit. With much caution we managed to get within five

hundred yards of them, and were rapidly decreasing the distance when the attitude of the oxen told us that they suspected something. But even when they saw us they appeared to have no fear, and allowed us to get within easy range, while they stood gazing, in surprised stupidity, at the strange figures approaching them.

‘Doesn’t it seem a pity, Godfrey, to shoot them when they show no fight?’ said Cecil. ‘But I suppose there’s no alternative.’

At that moment, however, they seemed to take alarm; and as they turned to flee in the opposite direction we forgot our scruples and simultaneously fired. Although a cow and a calf fell, the others, instead of continuing their flight, drew up together in consternation, and stayed so long that we might easily have picked them off one by one. But as we should only have had to abandon the flesh, we refrained from killing for killing’s sake alone; and after a minute’s hesitation they scampered off at a speed that one could never have imagined possible from their unwieldy appearance.

The animals shot having been cut up and their titbits stowed away on the sledge, we continued our laborious journey until the darkness compelled us to camp.

So far we had travelled in a north-easterly direction, but now, on the third day, our farther progress that way was stopped. For a time the ground had been steadily rising, and our labours in dragging the sledge were simply herculean, the more so that they were accomplished in the teeth of a blinding snow-storm. In the end we were obliged to stop; and, when the snow had ceased falling, Cecil and I in the dog-sledge pushed on to find out how far the ascent continued.

In the course of an hour or so we arrived at the summit; and, the air by this time having cleared, we saw before us a view that more than compensated us for all our trouble. In a moment, as it were, we had been transported into the midst

of an alpine country. In front of us stretched range upon range of snow-covered peaks, rising higher and higher, until in the distance their summits were invisible; and between were the long streak-like glaciers, so numerous that of the largest alone there must have been hundreds. Between us and the mountains was a jumble of low hills, obviously impassable for a sledge; while the average height of the mountains themselves could not have been less than ten thousand feet. Many of the peaks, indeed, must have been more than half as high again.

'Isn't it glorious?' I asked. 'An Arctic Switzerland on a large scale, only waiting to be explored!'

But Cecil did not seem to hear me. He was looking intently through the glass towards the north, and after a long scrutiny he handed it to me, saying, in a tone of suppressed excitement: 'Look there! That high, isolated peak rising above the rest. Tell me what you see.'

I did as he told me, adjusted the glass, and looked at the point he indicated, which might have been anywhere from ten to fifty miles distant; for the effects of refraction were such that no computation as to distance could be relied upon. At first I could see nothing peculiar, but in a little I made out what appeared to be a small black cloud resting on the summit. This was not, of course, in any way out of the common; and I was about to turn away, when I saw the dark cloud *lit up for an instant as by a gleam of fire*.

In my surprise I nearly dropped the glass; and then, not knowing exactly what to make of the phenomenon, I looked to Cecil.

'It must be a volcano,' he said.

'A volcano!' I echoed.

'Yes,' he replied, 'and I can tell you one or two things that support the idea. Where we camped last night there were rocks of several entirely different formations, and the soil was distinctly volcanic. And look down there'—pointing to

the tract between us and the mountains—‘*that* can be the result of nothing except a big convulsion of nature. Depend upon it, we’re in a volcanic district!’

And just then, as if to confirm his words, the cloud on the distant peak was again lit up, and from the phenomena I could no longer have any doubt that Mount Cecil Oliphant—as I named it at once—was indeed a volcano.

While we were still gazing at it we heard loud shouts, and, looking behind, saw the rest of the party painfully dragging the sledge up the hill. Descending, we gave them what help we could, and after two hours’ severe work we managed to gain the summit. By this time it was nearly dark and the snow-storm had recommenced; and so our friends could only hope that it would be clear enough on the following day for them to see that of which we had told them. Luckily they were not disappointed. In the early forenoon, however, another discovery was made by Gates that somewhat spoiled the effect of the first. He had climbed a steep pinnacle on our right to get a better view, but had not been there long before we saw him excitedly gesticulating to us to follow him. Doing so, we made out as soon as we got within earshot that:

‘There’s a water-sky to the south, sir, as plain as the *Aurora’s* funnel!’

The stoker was quite right. Running almost directly south by the compass was a valley, enclosed on both sides by mountains, and on the horizon we saw an unmistakable water-sky.

‘That’s the direction we must go!’ I said, decidedly. ‘If, as I imagine, we come to the sea in a day or two, it will prove that the coast runs some distance south-east from Weymouth Harbour before trending to the east. We will thus settle an important point, and perhaps also discover what becomes of all those glaciers, which certainly don’t reach the sea on the western coast-line.’

‘But the volcano?’ asked Cecil.

'Won't run away; and perhaps we may be able to visit it in the spring. At present it's clearly impossible.'

Before starting, a depôt of provisions was formed, consisting of one hundred and fifty pounds of pemmican and bacon, a little alcohol for fuel, and part of the meat of the musk-oxen we had shot. This, of course, lightened the sledge considerably, and when the dogs were harnessed they went off with it quite briskly. But when rougher ground was reached we had all to put our shoulders to the wheel—or rather the pulling-straps over our shoulders—and give way with a will.

The two days that it took us to descend the fifteen miles of this valley were, I think, the most exhausting I have ever spent. Owing to the state of the ground our progress was miserably slow; snow fell so thickly that we could see nothing beyond a radius of ten yards, and the intensity of the cold may be imagined when I say that the thermometer during all that time never rose above zero. Each night we had three or four cases of frost-bite, none of them, fortunately, very severe.

On our sixth day out we found ourselves quite unexpectedly upon a broad stretch of new ice, which we knew must be that either of an inland lake or of the sea. As nothing could be done until the snow ceased, we returned to land and camped there; and when daylight appeared next forenoon about eleven, we discovered that we were on an arm of the sea about a mile broad! Away to the south the illimitable Frozen Ocean was visible, broken up as usual by ice-holes and lanes, the cause doubtless of the water-sky we had seen. And, certain explanation of the destination of the many inland glaciers, it was studded over with innumerable icebergs, large and small.

That day there was no slow travelling. To us, so long accustomed to rough ground, the ice seemed absolutely level, though in fact it was far from being so; and we accomplished the eleven miles to the mouth of Jansen Fjord before three in the afternoon. Then, in the dim twilight, we

saw the coast stretching away eastward and westward ; and to the south of us was the ever-silent, ever-mystical Arctic Ocean, lying calmly as if in the consciousness that in her power still, in spite of the numberless brave Britons, Americans, Dutch, Russians, Scandinavians, and Austrians who had striven to wrest it from her, lay the secret of the North.

‘What is to be our course now?’ I asked that evening ; ‘whether are we to return or to follow the coast westward and northward to the harbour?’

‘I say go on,’ answered Cecil.

‘And so do I,’ said Wemyss, ‘for anything is preferable to a return over such ground.’

‘But isn’t it better to face the dangers we know than those we know not of?’ I retorted, laughingly. ‘However, if we’ve provisions enough’——

‘We’ve enough for twelve days yet,’ interrupted Wemyss, who was caterer.

‘That’s all right, then ; and if the men are agreeable, on we shall go !’

The men, having a lively recollection of what they had undergone, took Wemyss’s view, and voted unanimously for an advance ; and so, next morning—the morning of a day destined to be an eventful and exciting one—we turned to the west, and continued our journey along the ‘ice-foot.’ This, it may be as well to explain, is a belt of sea-ice which is formed against the land, and clings to it in spite of wind and tides, being, as a rule, separated by a ‘tidal crack’ from the movable ocean-ice. As it usually forms a secure track for travelling purposes, it is invariably taken advantage of by sledgers within the Arctic circle. It was along this, then, that we slowly pressed our way, deserting it whenever it ran inland to follow the course of some bay or inlet, and again using it whenever it suited our purposes. It was towards mid-day, when the light was strongest, that the cause of the excitement I have referred to was first seen by Cecil, who was in advance. At this point the ice-foot was much broken,

and there were several open lanes in the pack, telling of a strong tidal current. We noticed Cecil draw up and look intently before him for a moment. Then, with a shout, he ran on at full-speed. Following, we observed him bending over what appeared to be a mass of driftwood; and, as we joined him, we saw that it lay in considerable quantities all around.

What can this be?' I asked.

'Boat-wreckage, sir,' replied Gates. 'See the nails in the planks, and the grooves, and—look, sir—there's ropes and parts of an oar!'

'Boat-wreckage!' I was repeating, when I heard a cry from Pennell, who immediately came running towards me. He carried a plank, on which were painted several letters; and taking it from him, I made them out to be:

'—ern *Pharos*!'





CHAPTER X.

THE SLEDGE EXCURSION—PERILS AND PRIVATIONS.

THERE could be no doubt that it was the *Northern Pharos*, the vessel that had baffled all our conjectures so far, and now seemed as if destined to baffle them for ever, to which this board had belonged, and of whose fate it was a somewhat sinister indication. Of those present, only Cecil and I knew anything of her previous connection with us; and when I had pronounced the words I significantly motioned to him to say nothing. He understood the signal, and kept silent. Wemyss was the first to speak.

'*Pharos!*' he repeated, musingly. 'I wonder what we're to gather from this—whether the vessel has reached this coast and gone down here, or the wood has drifted from the far south?'

Neither Cecil nor I thought it worth while to point out that, as all the wood was of the same material, and there was no trace of drift of any other kind, the evidence was convincingly strong in favour of the former conjecture.

'Begging your pardon, sir,' said the sailor Pennell at this point, 'there's a Dundee whaler they calls the *Northern Pharos*—maybe it's her that this belonged to.'

'A Greenland one?' I asked.

'Yes, sir; this is only her second year, but they say she's a nice vessel.'

'A Dundee whaler!' said Wemyss. 'Can this have drifted all the way from the Greenland seas? Why, it's a problem after the doctor's own heart, and one that'll lead



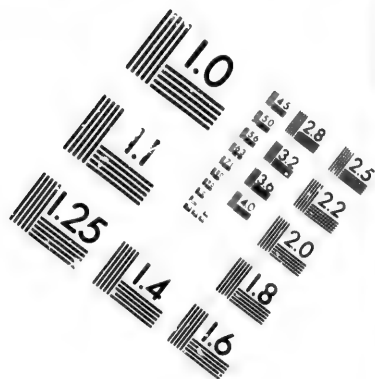
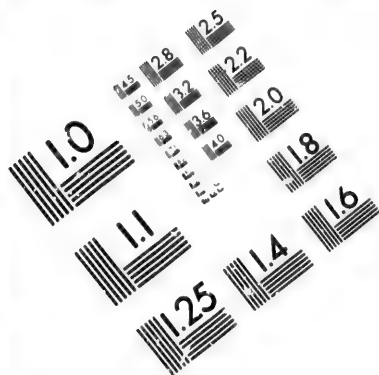
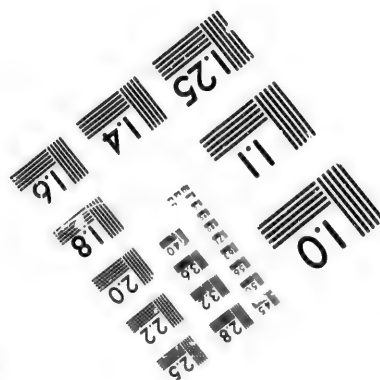
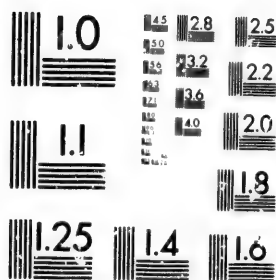


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to some interesting statistics on ocean-currents and the law of circulation.'

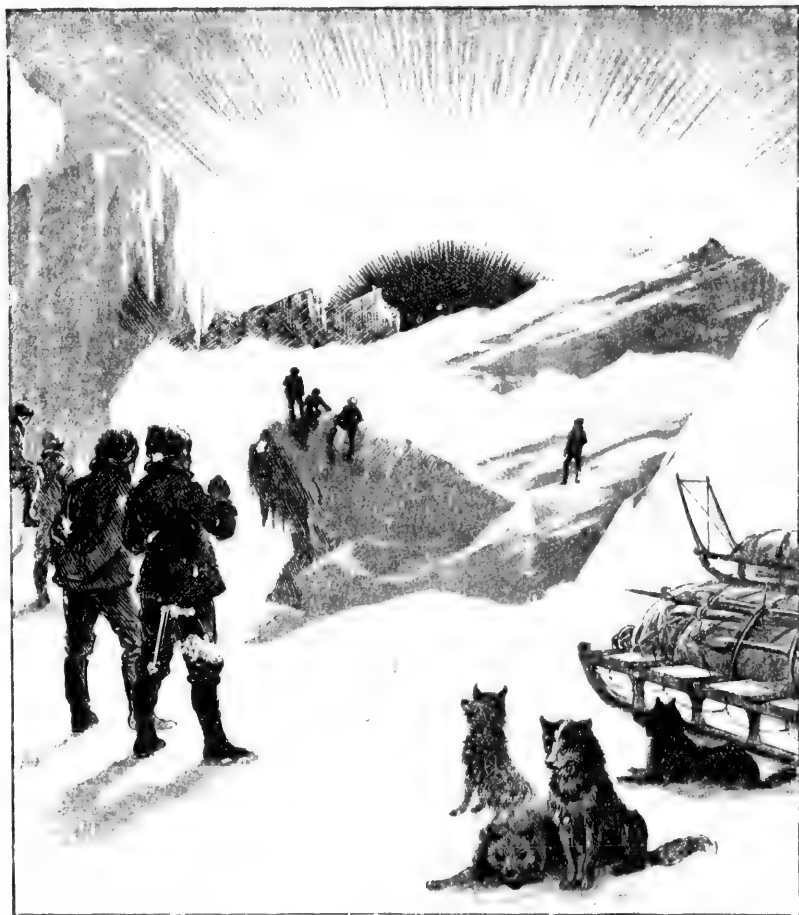
Meanwhile, the driftwood had been thoroughly searched without result for further traces of the mysterious ship; and, in the absence of any, the general idea was that the debris must have drifted from some distant spot. By the time the search was over it was dark, and so I decided to camp there for the night. Another reason was that by means of the wood we might have the unwonted luxury of a fire—a comfort to which we had been strangers since leaving the fort. While the supper was being prepared, we took Wemyss aside and told him all we knew of the *Pharos*, for in the circumstances it would hardly have been fair not to let him into the secret.

'It's a strange story,' he said, when I had concluded, 'and it's scarcely within the bounds of possibility, I think, that if the vessel did reach this coast she should have done so by chance, as the doctor supposes. There's little doubt she's gone down here; but what her purposes were, and what connection they had with the *Aurora*, we'll probably never know now.'

'Unless,' put in Cecil, 'some of her crew have escaped.'

'Hardly likely,' I said; 'at least, they can't have done so in this direction, else there would assuredly have been some trace of them. As you say, Wemyss, there's little doubt that she has foundered in these seas. Her purpose, after all, is a secondary matter, which we may ferret out when we return to England, but certainly not here.'

As there was evidently no solution of the mystery to be found at *Pharos Point*, as we named the place, the board was packed upon the sledge, and the journey resumed at dawn next forenoon. The day was uneventful; but at night we had the most magnificent display of the *Aurora Borealis* we had yet seen. Just before midnight the pitchy darkness was relieved by a gleam of light that disappeared as suddenly as it rose, only to be followed in a moment by



At night we had the most magnificent display of the Aurora Borealis we had yet seen.

others that became more and more numerous, until the whole southern horizon was lit up by a brilliant arc of light. Within the arc the dark sky remained as dark; but all around this spot of blackness, like the ever-moving ocean around a desolate island, the coruscation gleamed and brightened, now resembling the reflection of a vast conflagration, and again waxing softer and more mellow, as if ashamed of its former intensity. Slowly the zone spread over the sky, shooting out rays of red, and emerald, and violet; and when at length the heavenly dome was completely lit up with the radiance, the scene was one of indescribable grandeur. A marvellous effect was produced by the play of the Northern Lights upon the hummocks and bergs of the ice-bound ocean; and as the streamers gleamed over the frozen waters, and flashed meteor-like along the summits of the icebergs, we could imagine ourselves in a more enchanting fairyland than ever a childish fancy conceived. But after a time the light grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away so gradually that we were left standing in the awful silence of the Arctic night before we knew it had finally disappeared.

On the following day we turned the south-westerly point of Torrens Land—Cape Wemyss, we called it—within, we calculated, forty miles of Weymouth Harbour. Here the difficulties of our return journey practically began. So far the ice-foot had served us well, but within a mile of the turn of the coast to the north-west it disappointed us altogether. For some unaccountable reason it had either failed to form, or was so much cut up and broken as to be impassable; and the consequence was that we had to choose between finding a path on land or on the sea-ice. It was a case of Scylla and Charybdis: the land was so mountainous that it was scarcely to be thought of, while the ice was nearly as bad, and might also be treacherous. However, Charybdis was chosen, and our journey resumed upon the ice, under the additional discomfort of a biting wind from the north,

accompanied by a heavy fall of snow that for five days never ceased.

On the first day under these new conditions we only accomplished six miles; and on the second—the 10th of October—the sun set at mid-day, and was seen no more for four months and a half. The long and dreaded polar night had begun. But at first we had still a few hours of twilight in which to work; and it was during one of these that an almost fatal accident—an accident terrible in its consequences—happened. Blinded by the driving snow, which hid everything, and covered old and young ice alike, we were wearily dragging the sledge over the rough way. I had the leading strap, and was going doggedly on in ignorance of anything wrong, when I heard a loud crack behind me, followed by a howl from the dogs, and something that sounded strong from the men. We were brought to a standstill, and I hastily turned, in time to see the others pulling desperately at their straps.

‘With all your might!’ Wemyss was shouting. ‘The sledge’s going through, and if it does’—

There was no need to say anything more, for the mere possibility made us drag with such good-will that the sledge was gradually being recovered, when to our consternation the ice broke under it. In it went again, almost dragging us with it—indeed, partially immersing Jansen and Pennell—and as it did so we heard a sharp crack that sounded to us like the knell of doom, for it told us that one of the ropes had broken. By an effort almost superhuman we succeeded in getting the nose of the sledge upon firm ice, and thereafter ten or fifteen minutes’ steady tugging sufficed to clear it. But by this time we were all so exhausted that we could scarcely drag it to land, a few hundred yards distant, where, on a prominent headland—afterwards named Cape Misfortune—we resolved to camp for the night. An examination of our effects showed us the extent of our loss. One bag of provisions, containing seven days’ rations, was

gone, leaving barely sufficient for two days (and even that was thoroughly saturated with salt water); the tent and sleeping-bags on being exposed to the air froze as hard as boards, and the only thing that had escaped uninjured was the box containing the instruments and ammunition. But even worse than this, Pennell and Jansen were found to be severely frost-bitten on both feet, the effect of their immersion. Although we managed to restore the circulation before mortification set in, they were too lame to be of use for further dragging.

'We're certainly in a hole, and a pretty steep one, too,' I said to Wemyss and Cecil; 'but, after all, we can't be above thirty miles from the fort, and we *must* reach it in the two days. Fifteen miles a day doesn't seem much.'

'But we haven't three hours a day,' said Wemyss, despondingly, 'and in that we shall never do it.'

'We must, and that's all about it,' replied Cecil. 'If we don't we are dead men, and, speaking personally, I should prefer to reach Weymouth Harbour, even if we should have to tramp to it without stopping, in the dark or not.'

Next morning, accordingly, after a futile attempt to proceed on land, we again took to the ice, feeling our way with as much caution as was possible in the circumstances. It was a terrible day's work. The coast being hidden by the falling snow, we had to steer by compass; and as we wound our way between the hummocks and ice-hills, we became more and more disheartened by the difficulties of the route and by the successive misfortunes that overtook us. The first of these was the maiming of Gates, our strongest man, by a fall into a hidden fissure, from which we extricated him at some pains, to find that he was so much injured that he had to be laid upon the sledge. Then Wemyss and Grindlay broke through the ice and were disabled by frost-bite, reducing the auxiliary dragging strength to three—Cecil, myself, and Forbes. But notwithstanding all these mishaps we made good progress for a time, the dogs acting as if they knew our

lives depended on it. If our strength had held out, I have no doubt we should have done better still. But early in the afternoon we became aware that our energy was failing us; the dogs became listless and moved only at the word of command; and the invalids declared their inability to proceed much farther. Thus we had no alternative but to pitch our tent, which we did under the lee of another cape, and deliberate as to what should now be done.

Our position was critical in the extreme. None of the party, save Cecil and myself—for Forbes was completely prostrated by his exertions—was able to go farther without help; and the dogs, themselves tired out, were utterly incompetent to drag the sledge alone, with or without the extra weight of Gates. On the other hand, our provisions were nearly exhausted—we had only enough for one more meal. In a word, it was almost impossible to go on; and if we remained where we were we must starve.

‘It comes to this, Cecil,’ I said to my brother as we stepped outside to discuss the matter while Jansen was preparing supper, ‘either of us must go to Fort Lorimer for help, and at once.’

We were walking briskly up and down, but as I spoke Cecil stopped, only to resume his exercise as he felt the cold.

‘How is it to be done?’ he asked.

‘I have an idea. We must harness the best and least-tired dogs to the little sledge, and push on as fast as the obstacles will allow. It is the only hope, for I can’t hide that if we haven’t help by to-morrow—and there’s every chance of missing the entrance to the bay in this snow—we’re lost.’

‘Then let me go, Godfrey,’ urged my brother. ‘I think I am fresher, and if I’m lost it won’t matter so much to the others.’

‘I mean to go myself,’ I answered. ‘You are required here to attend to the men, any of whom may get worse

at any moment. The danger is equally great; if there *is* a chance, it's your duty to take it, if only for Edith's sake.'

He was about to reply, when Wemyss hobbled out to tell us that our repast was ready, and also that Pennell had become delirious. This decided me.

'I will go, Cecil,' I said, 'immediately after supper. There's still enough light to avoid hummocks, and if I don't return by to-morrow night you must try to get to the fort by some means or other.'

No more was said. Our scanty supper was devoured in a silence only broken by the ravings of Pennell and the groans of Gates, whose right ankle and arm were both badly sprained. Then I announced my intention of pushing on alone for help, pointing out that if I did not do so there was little hope, and asked the men to await my return with the patience and good-will they had always shown.

'God bless you, sir!' said Grindlay, when I had finished. 'We know you've done your best, and that if you can save us you will.'

'God helping me, I will!' I responded from my heart. Then, with the help of Cecil and Jansen, I set about choosing my team.

We could only find five dogs capable of work—Konig, Paradise Lost and Paradise Found, and Antony and Cleopatra; and these, much against their will, were harnessed to the Lapland sledge. At first they showed an invincible repugnance to leaving the encampment and their fellow-creatures; but when I had completed my arrangements and said farewell to my friends, and we were fairly on our way, nothing could be better than the spirit with which they entered into the work. At first the ice was comparatively level, and, considering the thick and ever-increasing layer of snow that covered it, we crossed it at a good speed. But before long we were amongst hummocks, and then it was I who had to lead the dogs, instead of being borne by them. It was

slow and tiring work to grope one's way amongst the masses of ice, fearful at every step of falling into a crevasse or breaking through the treacherous ice. I had had no sleep and very little food for twelve hours, and during that time had been doing the work of two men, so that I had little strength left for the fatigues of a journey such as this. It was almost mechanically, indeed, that I plodded on, knowing that it was to save not only my own life, but also the lives of those under my charge.

How far I had gone in this way I do not know, but I was aroused from my lethargy by my legs becoming entangled in the dogs' traces, which brought me heavily to the ground. It was still snowing; there was a faint light, by which I saw by the compass that I was heading correctly, and the ice was apparently free from hummocks. Placing myself on the sledge, I whipped up the dogs to a fair speed; but before we had gone far we were brought to a stop by the vicinity of land. This, at anyrate, showed me that I was in the right direction; and so I began to feel more confident of reaching my destination, if only I did not pass it in the dark. All my energies were required to prevent myself falling asleep where I sat, the consequence of which would have been the immediate stoppage of the dogs. I think I must have dozed for a considerable time, guiding and whipping the animals merely by instinct. At anyrate, I have no remembrance of what passed until a sudden jolt awakened me, and then I found that we were at a standstill. In vain I urged the dogs onward: they were evidently done up, and refused to move another inch.

'Nothing for it,' I said to myself, 'but to get out and walk.'

But even this was no easy matter. I was almost frozen, and my limbs were so stiff that it was a great effort to move them. And no wonder; for, on consulting my watch, I discovered that it was seven hours since I had left the camp, and of three of them I knew nothing.

Realising that I must walk to live, I pushed on through the soft, yielding snow, the dogs following alongside willingly enough now that they had no weight to pull. I was in a strange kind of stupor which I cannot describe, but still instinctively I glanced now and then at the compass to see that I was right. As to the rest I can say little. I remember, as in a dream, seeing through the snow some huge animal walking alongside us; but I took no notice until I was in a manner roused by several howls of anger or anguish from the dogs. Then, still sleepily, I lifted my loaded rifle from the sledge, and fired both barrels at the strange animal. I had no curiosity; I only knew that it followed us no longer, and then on again I went. But my strength was steadily failing. For perhaps five minutes I reeled onwards, and then I fell. I could neither rise nor resist the overpowering inclination I felt to sleep. Before I gave way, however, I had the presence of mind to slip the traces of the dogs, so as to allow them freedom; and then, with a confused feeling that I had failed and must now die, I became unconscious.

In half a minute, as it seemed, I recovered my senses, to find myself surrounded by a multitude of men bearing torches and lamps.

'Quick! more brandy!' one bending over me was shouting in a voice I recognised as Dr Lorimer's. 'He's recovering, captain; another second will do it.'

I tried to articulate, but for a moment or two failed.

'The rest are under a headland to the south,' at last I managed to say. 'All disabled except Cecil. No meat. Be quick if you mean to save them.'

'As bad as that?' he asked. 'We must lose no time. To the south, did you say? How far?'

'About twenty miles, I think, but I can't be sure. If you follow the coast you can't miss it.'

'Right! We'll find it somehow; and for assurance I'll take Konig.—Norris, I trust to you to see Mr Oliphant

comfortable; plenty of heat and rubbing, and there's no fear.—Now, captain, let's get the relief sledges ready.'

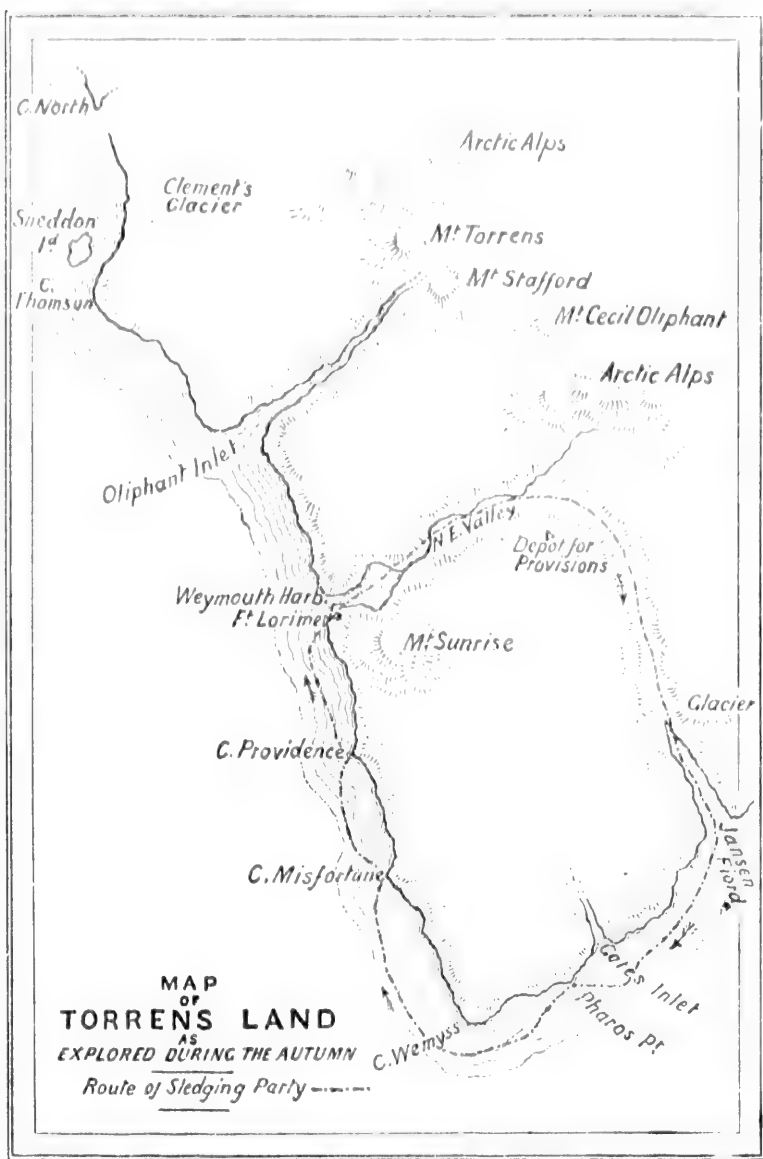
And at this point, just as I was being raised, I relapsed.

It was far on in the next day before I was sufficiently recovered to hear the story of the relief. Around me lay my comrades, all completely out of danger except Pennell, who was in a high fever. Two or three of them, however, had to sacrifice their big toes to the amputating-knife; and it was lucky, the doctor said, that the frost-bite had gone no farther.

It seems that when a fortnight had passed and we had not returned, the inmates of Fort Lorimer began to grow anxious. Daily journeys were made to the north-east valley; for, of course, they never expected us to appear from any other direction; but when the sun had departed and there were still no signs of us, they feared the worst. Their spare time they occupied in carrying out, so far as they could, Randolph Torrens's instructions to 'search within a radius of twenty miles;' but, like us, they had discovered not the least trace of 'white men.'

On the eventful evening of the rescue the doctor was in his observatory, when he heard a couple of shots—those I had fired in blissful ignorance of my proximity to the bay. Rushing into the house, he quickly got ready several necessities, and in company with the whole garrison sallied in search of me. Fortunately, he was guided by the howls of the dogs, whom he found, on coming up, standing over my lifeless body and using their lungs with all their might. Not fifty yards off was a dead bear, and near him poor Cleopatra, whom he must have killed just before my chance shots despatched him. The faithful animal, after her splendid services, certainly deserved a better fate, and it is little wonder that for some time Antony was inconsolable.

The instant I was safe, and the sledges ready, the doctor set off south; and when the probable vicinity of the camp was reached, rifles were fired every minute or two. But there



was little need of this, for König led them directly towards the spot; and there, when they arrived, they found their seven mates all so sound asleep that the firing had failed to awaken them. Some of them, indeed, could scarcely be roused at all. With all speed they were conveyed home on the sledges and put to bed; 'and,' the doctor concluded, 'it's as well you were rescued then, for in another hour or two you would all have shared the fate of Franklin!'

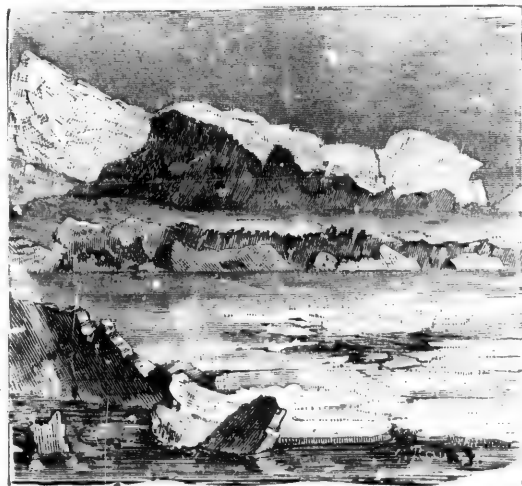
But all's well that ends well; and the mirth with which we celebrated our return promised much for a winter of pleasure and sociability. We were safe, and

The Fame

Of what has been, the Hope of what will be,

was sufficient to make us look forward to the long night that had commenced with a feeling at least of equanimity.*

* And here, at the conclusion of the narrative of our autumn labours, may most fittingly be given a map showing the extent of our explorations and discoveries in Torrens Land, and embodying the result attained at the expense of so much trouble and hard work.





CHAPTER XI.

THE WINTER PASSES AWAY.

AS I have already mentioned, the sun was seen for the last time on the 10th of October, and from that date until the beginning of March we had continuous darkness, relieved only by the light of the moon and stars, and the more fitful, though not less beautiful, gleams of the Aurora Borealis.

During our absence several improvements had been made upon Fort Lorimer. In the first place gas had been laid on, but the capacity of manufacture was so limited that the light had to be augmented by that of lamps. Daily outdoor exercise being indispensable to our health, a broad walk over a mile in length had been constructed, composed of layers of snow beaten hard and covered with sand, which, when frozen, gave it the appearance of a macadamised road. It was part of the exercise to keep it clear of newly-fallen snow, a duty during the earlier part of winter sufficient for three hours' daily exercise for all hands.

There was plenty of recreation, tobogganing after the Canadian fashion being perhaps (now that football was impossible) the favourite amusement, but work was not altogether neglected. Both, indeed, were made to serve the same purpose—the prevention of brooding over the situation, and the relief of that indefinable feeling of oppression caused by the unwonted absence of light. Each man had a certain duty, connected either with the manufacture of gas, the condensation of snow and ice into water, the cleaning and repair of the buildings, or with scientific investigations.

Of the latter the doctor had, of course, supreme command, and it was not long before he had the most willing of the officers and the most intelligent of the men formed into an efficient staff to help him. The observations were taken at all hours of the day and night, and were in every respect as complete and perfect as patience and perseverance could make them.

Notwithstanding all his work (and, as on board the *Aurora*, he was the busiest man amongst us), the doctor found time to conjecture on the fate of the *Northern Earos*, in which he took much interest.

'If you believe me,' he often said, as we sat round our parlour stove when the day's work was done and there was no entertainment in progress, 'I'd give a thousand pounds to find out what and how much that vessel knew of us—for she must have known something, or how could she have reached this land?'

'Done as easily as speaking,' the captain interposed: 'been caught in the ice like ourselves and drifted north. What was to hinder her?'

'Nothing; but until the opposite is proved I prefer to believe that it was design, and not chance, that brought her here. For one thing, and I know it, it isn't likely to be proved; and yet the condition of perpetual wonder in which it keeps me will hurry me to an untimely grave one of these days.'

Another subject of deep interest, and one often discussed, was the extent of Torrens Land and its physical features, especially the supposed volcano we had seen during our excursion.

'There's no reason,' the doctor argued, 'why the land shouldn't be volcanic; we've got burning mountains in Iceland and Alaska, and even the frost of this high latitude is powerless against the earth's mighty interior heat. My opinion, taking account of the altitude of the mountain-ranges and the general configuration of the country, is that Torrens Land is of immense extent. So there's still some glory to be

achieved in exploring it—more, I think, than we imagine, if not more than we have dreamt of in our own minds.’

Little did Dr Lorimer realise how prophetic his words were, or how truly, in the days to come, his half-serious prognostic was to be fulfilled !

‘What we have to do now,’ I said, ‘is to make another thorough search in accordance with our instructions ; and if that is fruitless of result, we can then carry out the doctor’s dream of glory. We’ve a few problems to solve ; among others, the cause of the current in Oliphant Inlet, the existence of Mount Cecil Oliphant as a volcano, and the extent of land towards the pole. Indeed, our work for next year is cut out for us.’

‘I should think it is,’ replied Cecil, emphatically ; ‘and it wouldn’t surprise me if we had to spend another winter here.’

‘Not if we can avoid it,’ answered the doctor. ‘It would hardly be fair to the men ; worse still, it might be dangerous to their health. If at all possible, we must do all we have to do between April and August next year. I’ll vouch for this winter with an easy conscience, for it is a novelty to us all ; but certainly not for the next !’

Well might he vouch for that winter ; for, thanks chiefly to him, the days passed quickly away without the least trace of illness except an occasional superficial frost-bite. Pennell, our only invalid, recovered slowly but surely, and before the end of the year was quite himself again.

It is far from my purpose to inflict on my readers a detailed account of our long Arctic night. If they wish it, they may have it in the narrative of every explorer from Barents to Nansen ; and for my own part, there is still so much to tell of our subsequent adventures that to narrate everything would be to place a severe tax on the patience of all concerned. Only the more important incidents and adventures can be touched upon. For the rest, suffice it to say that we never wearied ; throughout the day we had our work ; every alternate night we had a dramatic entertainment, a lecture, or

a concert; and on the others a school was conducted—‘for the teaching of the higher branches of education,’ as the doctor grandiloquently put it.

Game, I may only mention in a word, was sufficiently plentiful to supply us with fresh meat now and then. During the winter we shot altogether nine bears, a few foxes, two wolves, and fifteen or sixteen musk-oxen. The whole of the latter were killed in the course of two days, the herds being surrounded each time and annihilated. The *Aurora* was a favourite meeting-place for the bears, and on that account it had to be boarded up on every part, to prevent them doing damage; but, notwithstanding this, scarcely a day passed without a bear-hunt, with the vessel as base. Generally, however, the bears escaped.

November in due time gave place to December, and as December in turn began to draw to a close, indications were not wanting of the approach of

Christmas stout,
The hearty, the true, and the bold.

The day was eagerly looked forward to by all, not only on account of its associations, but also because it marked the turning-point of the winter, as after the 21st the sun was again coming nearer and nearer to us.

On the morning of the eventful day—as it was to prove—we were roused by the singing of the beautiful Christmas carols by a party of waits; and when breakfast was over we were invited to pay a formal visit of inspection to the men’s quarters. The two rooms were tastefully decorated with flags, imitation holly, and designs of coloured paper. Here divine service was conducted, and thereafter the men dispersed to do the necessary work.

At noon advantage was taken of the faint light to carry through an open-air programme that had been drawn up. There were tobogganing races, in which the luckiest won; there was a keenly contested tug-of-war; and finally there

were several exciting two-dog sledge races along the promenade, in which, to the men's immense gratification, the two Paradises were invariably successful. A bonfire and display of fireworks ended the proceedings, and it did not detract from their effect that they took place early in the afternoon.

Of course the great event of the day was the dinner at four o'clock. That the cook and his assistants had excelled themselves was the unanimous opinion as the tables, loaded with good things, were scanned—bear steaks, roast musk-oxen, frozen mutton, hams, salt junk, tinned meats of every description, mince-pies, preserved fruits, and the inevitable plum pudding! An extra allowance of spirits was dispensed to the men, and at our mess we had, in addition to the above, several bottles of wine that had been kept specially for the occasion. After dinner Edith Torrens's Christmas box was opened by her representative, and found to contain packages addressed by name to every officer and man in the crew, each containing a present more or less useful. You may be sure that three ringing cheers were given for the fair donor, and that her happiness was pledged with the utmost enthusiasm; for there is nothing that goes more directly to the heart of a wanderer in a far country than an attention such as this. Perhaps it brought home to us more forcibly than anything else the thought of how the day was being spent in every household in England, of those we had left behind there, and of what *they* were thinking of the sojourners in this lonely Arctic land.

In the evening *Box and Cox* was played by the Circumpolar Comedy Company before a fashionable audience, the proceedings being varied by divers songs and readings. Thereafter dancing was commenced—without that it would hardly have seemed a festival to the men—and Cecil at the piano had no rest unless when the doctor took pity on him for a few minutes now and again.

It was while Captain Sneddon, the doctor, and I were standing watching the fun, and comparing notes about former

Christmases, that the greatest surprise of the day happened—a surprise with which we had nothing to do, and which startled us about as much as anything could have done. A little before midnight the doctor drew our attention to a faint rumbling sound as of very distant thunder, so low that it was scarcely audible.

‘Bless my soul! what’s that?’ asked the captain.

‘The ice must be breaking up somewhere,’ the doctor replied; ‘and yet, at this time of the year, it’s curious.’

Even while he was speaking the sound was repeated, and at the same time we felt a slight shock, such as might be caused by an explosion at some distance. The dancing stopped; the dancers began to throng around us. A dozen questions were addressed to the doctor, who was regarded by all as an encyclopædic wonder; but he was obviously as puzzled as any of us.

‘I don’t know what it is,’ he said; ‘I can’t even imagine; but, of course, we must find out.’

So saying he led the way outside, just as we felt a second distinct shock. There was a faint luminous haze in the atmosphere, through which, however, we could distinctly see the other side of the bay, with the dismantled *Aurora* in the middle of it. At first the only matter for surprise was the eccentric and, to most of us, inexplicable conduct of some of the stars, which appeared to be bobbing up and down in a manner highly erratic, not to say alarming. The phenomenon, as the doctor promptly explained, was an optical illusion due to the fall of imperceptible frozen particles; but the whole thing was so unlike an illusion that some of the men flatly refused to believe that the heavenly bodies weren’t acting in a most improper way!

Our attention was again turned to the affairs of this world by hearing for the third time the sound that had puzzled us; but, as before, we could form no idea as to its cause.

‘I’m utterly at a loss’—— Dr Lorimer began.

He was interrupted by several shouts:

‘Look at the ice ! Look at the ice !’

We did so, and saw that close into the shore it was rising and falling like violently agitated water. This went on for a minute or two, then the firmly frozen mass broke up, and instantly it was piled into hummocks and ice-hills, or crushed by collisions with other pieces. While we were intently watching this scene, we were alarmed by feeling the ground under our feet in motion ; and our alarm was not decreased, when, by the violence of the shock, part of the snow stockade surrounding Fort Lorimer was thrown to the ground. Then, instantaneously, we realised what was happening.

‘It’s an earthquake !’ cried the doctor.

An earthquake ! But there could be no doubt of it, though such a thing was so unexpected and out of place, as it were, in that quarter of the world, that we had never even thought of connecting the previous shocks with it.

Meanwhile, the effect of the third tremor upon the ice was tremendous. While it was not sufficiently strong to do much damage on land, it disturbed the waters of the bay to such an extent that the ice was smashed and thrown up with as much ease as if it were only two inches thick instead of nine or ten feet. As we saw it crashing hither and thither, we grew anxious concerning the vessel in its midst. At first the *Aurora* had remained immovable, owing to the strength of the frozen mass around her ; but as this became diminished by conflicts with other masses, she was seen to sway a little. The crisis came when the water was again agitated, and the vessel, as if impelled from below, broke loose from the ice and swung round with her *stern* towards us.

‘There’s no chance for her !’ said Wemyss, with a groan that was echoed by every one there.

‘To think of foundering in harbour after getting through the pack and reaching this latitude !’ muttered the captain ; and even at that critical moment one could not help being sorry for the old man.

But the *Aurora* had not foundered yet. For a few minutes

there was no further shock, and the frost was so intense that the separated masses would soon have become welded together if they had not been disturbed. Just as we were beginning to hope that this would be the case, we experienced the fourth and most severe tremor of all—so severe that we were thrown to the ground, while we again saw the ice in more violent commotion than ever. Our hearts sank ; and at that moment, as if to complete our consternation, we heard a loud crash behind us, and knew that part of the fort had fallen.

Two slighter shocks followed the great one in quick succession, and then they ceased altogether. So far we had had no time to look about us, but now we saw that, while the ice in the bay was still heaving up and down, the worst was over. And the *Aurora*, the only link that connected us with the world, so to speak, had been jammed between two huge masses of ice, and was again motionless—whether damaged severely or not we neither knew nor at the time could find out.

‘Thank Heaven she’s still above water, at anyrate!’ cried Captain Sneddon, fervently.

Ten minutes passed without further disturbance, and we began to feel a little easier in our minds. Our steps, now that we had no immediate anxiety about the *Aurora*, were turned towards the fort, which, in fear of what might meet our eyes, we had neglected since the crash. Our joy, then, may be imagined when we found that the main building, even including the tower, had been uninjured, and was apparently as firm as on the day of its completion. But one of the storehouses had succumbed, and the observatory was in a dangerous state, while the whole of the snow stockade had been thrown down by the destructive underground force. The interior of the fort was a scene of chaos. Tables, chairs, and everything else had been overturned, the cook’s crockery was smashed to atoms, and several of the lamps were broken. Only the stoves and the bunks had remained unshaken. Things, however, were soon put to rights, and, as may be sup-

posed, that Christmas night was spent, not in the deepest sleep, but in animated talk over the strange events of the evening.

'I admit,' the doctor said, 'that it takes away one's breath at first, but on consideration what is there extraordinarily wonderful in it? We had already come to the conclusion that the country was volcanic, and if a country is volcanic, earthquakes are as natural as oranges to Seville. But then, you say, there were no signs of previous upheavals about here. Quite so; and that brings me to the theory that to-night's commotion is the tag-end, so to speak—I might call it the spent force—of some earthquake that is going on in the interior. Probably it is never felt more severely at this point; but I must say I shouldn't like to be within the influence of its full force.'

'That may be so,' Captain Sneddon put in, 'and to you scientific fellows'—with a world of scorn in his tones—'everything may be as simple as the A B C; but for my part, this is the first time I've been in an earthquake, and *my* opinion is we're better without 'em!'

'Granted,' replied the doctor; 'but you'll admit that after the thing's over an explanation is satisfactory, and you'll admit, too, that they're highly interesting?'

'So's a murder to some people,' dryly retorted the captain. 'And what use are they?'

'Like murders—none,' I said. 'And if we have a few more, and the fort falls in, or the *Aurora* is crushed by the ice, we may find ourselves in a fix. As it is, we should be thankful we've escaped so easily.'

The full extent of the damage was apparent when we made a systematic examination next day. Perhaps the most serious loss of all was caused by the overturn and breakage of some of the valuable instruments in the observatory: the building itself was repaired without much difficulty. The storehouse that had fallen was also gradually rebuilt; and as for the stockade, its re-erection only gave us all some exercise for the next few days. It was to the *Aurora*, of course,

that we turned with the greatest eagerness. The ice in the bay was again one firm mass, the open spaces of the previous night being covered with it to the thickness of seven or eight inches, and its whole appearance contrasted sharply with its former smoothness and regularity of surface. A thorough inspection of the vessel only added, if that were possible, to our admiration of her resisting powers; for the only injury we could discover was, as on another occasion, the starting of one or two planks—a matter that the carpenter put right in an hour or two.

It may be as well to interpolate here that the only other evidence of subterranean agitation we had during the winter was a single shock in March, but it was so slight that it passed away almost before we were aware of it.

The new year was inaugurated at Fort Lorimer with great ceremony and much rejoicing, for in it we expected to make wonderful discoveries, and prove ourselves worthy of our trust. In January, perhaps the only event deserving of mention was a terrific storm that rose on the 14th and continued for three days. In February, towards the end of the month, we had our period of greatest cold. During the last fortnight the temperature was seldom above -50° Fahr. (82° below the freezing-point); and on the 27th we recorded our lowest, -81° , or 113° below the freezing-point.

By that time, in anticipation of the sun's return, our preparations for the spring's campaign were well advanced. Plans for a systematic survey were drawn out, sledges and provisions were chosen and got ready, and the dogs were exercised and put into good condition for dragging. It was arranged that there were to be three parties—one under the command of myself and Clements, to the north-east, as before; another, under Cecil and Norris, to the south; and the third, under the doctor and Wemyss, to the north of the bay, all three parties to converge on a stated point. While we were away, those at the fort were to get the *Aurora* ready for a cruise along the coast as soon as the water became open;



Slowly and gradually, as if reluctant to shine upon our desolate world, the sun itself appeared.

or, if that were not possible, to prepare the launch for a second trip to Oliphant Inlet.

Daily the period of light lengthened, and daily our spirits rose at the prospect of some hard work at last. The sun was due on the 1st of March, but for a day or two previously we saw at noon evidence of his coming in a rosy glow on the southern horizon, and fleeting gleams of fire that, like the first rays of the Aurora Borealis, were visible only for a moment. One living in a country where the sun is never absent (if seldom visible) can have no conception of the excitement caused by the mere *idea* of his reappearance to those who have lived in total darkness for four or five months. In our case it was intense; and when a proposal was made that we should go to the summit of a hill to get a better view of his arrival, nobody raised any objections.

Just before noon on the auspicious day, then, nearly three-fourths of the ship's company found themselves assembled on the summit of Mount Sunrise, as we named the hill. Already there was a fiery glow to the south. Suddenly a bright ray shot up from the still invisible luminary, and for a moment rested on the hill-tops; and then slowly and gradually, as if reluctant to shine upon our desolate world, the sun itself appeared. What though barely half its disc was visible, and even that only for a few minutes: was it not enough that in that time we had seen the bleak wastes of snow and ice suffused with a rosy glow that to us was the harbinger of a new existence? The cheers with which we greeted the King of Day were long and hearty; and our ecstasy was so great, indeed, that we might have remained there long after his disappearance, had we not been suddenly reminded by the temperature of -53° that motion was imperative.

'But no matter,' said the doctor, as we descended the hill; 'it was a glorious sight, and one that almost recompenses one for the winter's dreariness. And to us it means that a new year is born—let us hope a year of glory and honour to the Randolph Torrens expedition!'



CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.



ON the 5th of April, exactly five weeks after the reappearance of the sun, we started in the steam-launch to explore Oliphant Inlet.

By this time the three sledge expeditions had done their work and returned. We had left as soon as the state of the ground permitted, and had carefully searched every likely spot within the twenty miles' radius of Weymouth Harbour without finding the least trace of inhabitants, present or past. The party under my command worked its way through North-east Valley to the point from which, in the preceding year, we had seen the volcano; and on this occasion, as before, we found all our attempts to penetrate in the direction of the mountains quite unavailing, the route being absolutely impassable. Owing to the density of the air, we never even caught a glimpse of Mount Cecil Oliphant; and after surveying every inch of the surface around, and remaining at the spot for two days, we had to leave, to keep our rendezvous with the other sledges. Their success having been no greater than our own, we decided to give up the search, and return at once to Fort Lorimer.

When we arrived there, the *Aurora* was still firmly fixed in the ice, which in the bay showed no signs of motion as yet. But, early as it was, a lane of open water that broadened daily was visible off the coast, through what agency we could not imagine, as, according to the doctor, 'the heat of the sun is hardly strong enough to melt it, there have been no gales

of wind to break it up, and the opening isn't in the least like a temporary one.' However inexplicable it might be, we made immediate preparations to take advantage of it by loading the launch and one of the boats with provisions and ammunition for six months, for there was no saying how far our voyage might extend.

'If we can find our way to the Pole,' Cecil said, 'it's not to be supposed we'll turn back without reaching it; and so it's best to be on the safe side when there's no reason for not being.'

Besides the necessary scientific instruments, we also took with us the balloon, the doctor suggesting that we might find some use for it. Nor did we forget a stock of dynamite cartridges and the electric battery; while two light sledges and the best dogs formed an indispensable part of our equipment.

After much consideration, the party was made up as follows: myself, Cecil, Dr Lorimer, second mate Wemyss, second engineer Clements, Gates the stoker, and Nils Jansen.

The ship was left in command of Captain Sneddon, with written instructions to use every means of getting her free; and if that were done before our return, to take her as far north as the open water extended, leaving a party at the fort to await us. He was to be back at Weymouth Harbour by August at the latest, and if by that time we had not arrived, to use his own discretion about wintering or making his way to Europe.

I have gone into this matter in detail because of the importance the excursion about to begin was to assume, not only with regard to the length of time we were to be absent, but also (and more particularly) with regard to the character of the discoveries we were to make. I do not think I am anticipating much when I gravely and emphatically say that in my opinion (and I am sure it will be that of my readers also, if they will accompany me a little farther) these discoveries are amongst the most important of the century.

But little idea had any of the seven of us of all this as we completed our preparations, and got ready for our eventful journey into the unknown regions of the Arctic world. At last everything was completed, the two vessels dragged over the ice and launched in the open water beyond, both of them packed and put to trial, and our personal effects placed on board. Then we said farewell to our comrades, the captain heartily wishing us the fullest measure of luck, and finally steamed off with the boat in tow, amid the cheering of those we had left behind. We saw the last of them—not knowing that it *was* the last for many months to come—as we turned a headland; but I remember wondering if it was an omen that Konig raised a dismal howl as we disappeared, or if he was merely bewailing the subjects he had been obliged to desert.

The open water seemed to broaden towards the north; and, indeed, opposite the mouth of Oliphant Inlet, where we arrived in the course of the afternoon, there was no ice to be seen except on land. The current, also, was so strong that our progress was slower than we liked, and the doctor was as puzzled as we had been to give a reason for it.

‘As you say, Cecil, my boy,’ he observed, ‘there’s something to be investigated here. Ordinarily, all this should still be ice-bound, and though the current may account for the open water, how are we to account for the current? And have you never observed,’ he went on, ‘that our present route up this fjord or estuary is strangely in accordance with Randolph Torrens’s direction—to the north-east, towards the high mountains in the distance? Perhaps, owing to some ambiguity in his paper, we may have been mistaken so far, and it was towards this point he meant us to search.’

‘But it’s beyond the radius of twenty miles,’ I pointed out.

‘Perhaps, though not much; but there’s some room for doubt, I think, if he really intended that to apply to the command to search “especially in a NE. direction,” &c.

At anyrate, if we do find any traces, we'll follow them up willingly enough, I suppose.'

We camped that night on a small islet about eight miles up; and on the next forenoon reached our farthest point of the preceding year, from which the Arctic Alps and Mounts Stafford and Torrens were visible. Hitherto the inlet had wound between huge cliffs, but now these gave way to gently sloping banks. At this time, too, the doctor made a discovery that astonished him and the rest of us not a little. He was leaning over the side of the launch, when his hat fell into the water, and he made a quick grab to secure it before it floated away. He succeeded; but he immediately threw it down, and dashed into the small cabin for one of his thermometers.

'What's up?' I inquired, as he placed it in the water, withdrew it after a little, and made some hasty calculations.

'Just this,' he said, excitedly: 'the temperature of that water's a little above 43° Fahrenheit, and that's the reason why the weather's so mild;' for we had been obliged that morning, on account of the heat, to take off some of our furs. 'And,' he continued, 'that explains also the phenomenon of the ice disappearing so early, and a few other things. But the question is, where does this comparatively hot water come from in this latitude, and at this time of the year? It beats me altogether; but I shall be surprised if we're not on the scent of a discovery that'll amaze Hamilton Nelson, along with the rest of the scientific world!'

The worthy doctor's excitement was shared by every one on board the launch, even including the phlegmatic Nils Jansen; and for the rest of the day we never tired of testing the temperature of the water, always finding it nearly the same. Lorimer's zeal having been roused, he could not rest until he had analysed it and subjected it to various chemical experiments, the only practical result of which was that he found it to be several degrees less salt than the ocean—strong evidence, if not proof positive, that the inlet was the

estuary of a considerable river. Our observations also showed the existence and extent of tidal influence.

Early in the afternoon, as we were coming nearer and nearer the twin-mountains that rose up in front of us, we put into a little cove on the port side at the request of Lorimer, who wished to collect some specimens of flora (moss and saxifrage) he saw growing on the bank. While he was doing so, the rest of us also took the opportunity of stretching our legs on *terra firma*; and Cecil managed to improve the occasion by bagging a few brace of birds of the skua species, which were plentiful around. Gates, however, outdid this by bringing to us two pairs of reindeer horns in a good state of preservation, and apparently recently shed. He had come across them a few yards from the shore, but in a position precluding the supposition that they had been deposited there by the current.

'Strange!' the doctor commented, when he had examined them. 'Reindeer have never been heard of within several degrees south of this, and here we have indisputable evidence of their existence. Gentlemen, this is another proof that we're approaching either a mystery or the solution of one. Let us go on as fast as we can!'

This was done, and before it became dark we had made such good progress that we were under the shadow of the two high mountains of which I have already spoken. Then we saw that, to all appearance, Oliphant Inlet ran between them, and that they were connected by lower ranges of hills with high mountains that stretched on each side—Mount Torrens with the Arctic Alps, and its neighbour with a range nearly as high. The inlet narrowed as we advanced between the bases of the mounts, the altitude of which seemed to be at least three thousand feet; and as a consequence the current increased in strength—so much so, that after a time we made little headway. As darkness was beginning to fall, and the sides rose up so precipitously that to land was impossible, we had to consider the advisability of turning back to a safe

camping-place. But, fortunately, we were saved the necessity of this by the fjord presently widening out on the right-hand (Mount Stafford) side in the form of a bay, in which the current was not nearly so strong. For some distance from the water's edge the shore was comparatively level, and then it rose gently; and not five hundred yards up this slope we saw what appeared to be steam or smoke ascending from the hillside.

'This is our place,' I said. 'Run her straight in, Clements.'

The engineer obeyed, and we landed and made fast the boats to a jutting rock. Then, while the rest of us set about raising the tent and preparing supper, the doctor went off to examine the spring on the hillside. He had scarcely reached it, however, when we saw him gesticulating with might and main, and heard him shouting to us to follow him. Hurrying up to where he stood, we found him gazing as if fascinated at some object that lay at his feet, half-hidden by the snow, and within a yard of the little spring, which was of hot water.

'Oliphant! Cecil!' he said, in a voice that did not sound like his own, 'tell me, what's that?'

We looked, and for an instant discredited the evidence of our eyes, for that which lay there seemed to us *the old and rusty, but yet recognisable barrel of a gun!* Still doubting, we looked a second time, and then glanced at each other as if to discover if what one saw was visible to the rest.

'Can it be?' asked the doctor, interpreting the thought of each.

'That is easily settled,' I said, realising that the proof or disproof lay ready to my hand; and, bending down, I endeavoured to loosen the object from the snow. But it was firmly frozen, and it was not until Gates had brought a hatchet from the launch and broken up the mass that we got it free. Even then a coating of ice clung so firmly to it that we had to place it over the boiling spring for a few minutes before

it had thoroughly melted. This accomplished, we saw that our first conjecture was right—that our find was in reality a gun, one of the old muzzle-loading firearms so common before the perfection of the rifle.

It was passed from hand to hand and closely inspected by all, as if in it were hidden the secret of its discovery; but it could tell no story beyond the mute yet pregnant one that the foot of the white man had once before pressed this spot, and at a time not far distant. The whole incident, in its aspect of wonder, as in its startling suddenness, was to us as the footprint in the sand to Crusoe, and none of us spoke until the silence was broken by Cecil.

‘I have it!’ he exclaimed, in excitement. ‘The traces of white men we were to search for and follow up—this is a trace if ever there was one!’

‘You are right, Cecil!’ cried the doctor; ‘and I’m a fool not to have thought of that before. We’re on the right track at last, as I’ve been trying to convince you—and myself—all day; and the fortunate discovery of this gun gives us a base for further search’——

‘Which must be postponed until to-morrow,’ I interrupted, noticing for the first time that it was so dark that the camp was barely to be seen, and moving off in that direction.

Of the discussions and conjectures to which the evening talk gave rise, I intend to say nothing, nor of our terrible suspense during the following hours of darkness. With the earliest gleam of dawn we were on our feet, eager to begin the work of searching, and by the time the sun had appeared on the summits of the encircling hills we had covered a considerable portion of the ground around the spring, without, however, meeting with any further success. The slope, it may be as well to mention, rose gently for some distance above this point, and then it gradually became more and more steep, until it merged in the precipitous sides of Mount Stafford. Only at one part was there a break—a little to the right, where there was a huge cleft in the rock,

as if it had been split by some convulsion. A large amount of snow and ice still lay everywhere, and though it was evidently decreasing daily, there was more than sufficient to interfere materially with our work.

After breakfast we commenced a systematic survey, each of us taking a different route and examining as thoroughly as was possible. But for a time our efforts met with no result whatever, and this, added to the monotony of the work, began to tell upon our spirits. At mid-day discouragement had usurped the place of enthusiasm, and it was even hinted that there was little use in spending our time in such a wild-goose chase as this appeared to be.

‘I must say,’ confessed the doctor himself, ‘that though I don’t advise giving it up just yet, I’m a little disappointed. But what are we to do now?’

‘Begging your pardon, sir,’ put in Gates, ‘but might I say what *I’d* do?’

Gates, I should have said before, seemed to take an interest in our projects greater than any of the other men. He was a canny, intelligent, ingenious Scot, able to turn his hand to almost anything; and if he had lost most of his Doric in wandering over the world, he had also managed to keep his eyes and ears open to some purpose. As we had more than once already benefited by his advice, we told him to speak on.

‘Well, sirs,’ he said, ‘you’ll notice that there’s hills on every side here, except at that bit pass up there’—pointing to the cleft I have mentioned—‘and so I think there’s little use in searching up and down. If they came by a boat, likely they went away in a boat; and if they didn’t, it’s likeliest they came by that pass. Anyway, we might search there before we leave.’

‘A sensible suggestion!’ exclaimed the doctor; and so we immediately set about putting it into effect. From the spring we worked steadily up towards the cleft, prodding in every likely spot with our pointed spears, and carefully

scrutinising every inch of the ground; and it was not long before Gates had the satisfaction of seeing his theory triumphantly verified. A little to the right of the direct line, Clements drove his spear quite unsuspectingly into a natural-looking mound, but the next moment he was energetically breaking up the mass of snow and simultaneously shouting to us. Even before we came up he had half-uncovered what we made out to be a sledge, by the side of which was a clasp-knife, such as is used by sailors.

‘We’re on the right track!’ I cried. ‘Don’t waste time here—let us get onward!’

With our feelings of excitement and anticipation at their utmost stretch, we pressed on, and within ten minutes discovered other two evidences of our predecessors—a compass and a second gun. By this time we were at the mouth of the cleft, which was about a hundred feet across, and seemed to cut right through the mountain. We had not gone much farther, when we were pulled up short by an exclamation from Gates, whom we saw pointing to something that only became visible at that moment.

‘Look there!’ he cried.

We did so, and saw on an elevation close into the left side of the cleft what seemed only a mound of snow, but surmounting it was a pole, to which still clung a few shreds of what had doubtless once been a flag. We rushed forward with the eagerness of men whose long-deferred hopes were at length to be fulfilled, but the next moment fell back in horror—some with cries of dismay. For there, in a kind of natural cave formed between the rock and the hillock on which the cairn stood, we distinctly saw *the remains of several men*, covered but not hidden by a thin shroud of snow.



CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT WE SAW FROM MOUNT STAFFORD.

WHAT we had seen in that single glance—the scattered bones of one man, and the outlines of the forms of others—had so shattered our nerves that for a moment we held back from a further examination. Then another feeling supervened. ‘We must get to the bottom of this,’ I said, and moved towards the cave.

Followed by Cecil and the doctor, I entered. The rest watched us from without. From the situation of the place in the corner of the cleft, it had evidently been protected from the weather, and the small amount of snow in it was apparently of that year. Across the open side of it were the remains of a wall, composed of small pieces of rock, that had long since fallen to pieces. Just within this lay the ghastly relics—a skull, to which was still attached a few pieces of skin, and below it the skeleton of a powerful man. Farther back, at the upper end of the cave, were the bones of two others, covered by waterproof cloaks which had retained to that day the impression of the bodies that had long crumbled to dust beneath them. Round about were many articles that for us had a sad and painful interest—arms, a bag of ammunition, empty pemmican cans, instruments, a spirit-lamp, and several other things. But Dr Lorimer, while Cecil and I inspected these, heeded none of them, being engaged in minutely examining the floor of the cave. Suddenly he pounced upon something that lay beside the dead man at the threshold.

‘What is it, doctor?’ I asked.

For answer he held up a small notebook. At the same spot we afterwards discovered a pen and an empty ink-bottle.

‘*This*,’ he said, ‘contains the secret; you won’t find it, Oliphant, by further groping in there. Let us leave these’—indicating all that was left of the tenants of the spot—‘where they are a little longer until we know their story; it doesn’t matter to them now what we do or how we treat them. Poor fellows!’

Half-sickened as we were by the scene, and almost overpowered by the thought of these men—countrymen of our own, it might be—and the death they must have died, we willingly followed the doctor into the open air. He handed me the notebook, which with scrupulous delicacy he had refrained from opening. I did so, and glanced over the contents. There were only a few short pages, but the first words that met my gaze told me that we had accomplished the primary object of the expedition. Without reading further, I looked up to address the doctor, and found the eyes of every member of the party fixed upon me with such extreme suspense that it would have been the most refined cruelty not to read it aloud.

I give it verbatim :

August 7, 1856.—This day a party of six men belonging to the steamer *Weymouth*, at present lying in Weymouth Harbour, reached this spot by sledge, having crossed the land in a NE. and ther. N. direction, Messrs Torrens and Stafford, owners, in command. It being certain that the water-way was an inlet, the commanders resolved to return by it to the ship in our india-rubber Halkett canoe. As it only holds four persons, they chose John Pearson and Benjamin Rodgers, seamen, to accompany them. The rest—self, Alexander Collins, mate, in command; Thomas Butler and John Reas, seamen; and James Parr, cook—were left behind with the following verbal instructions :

(1) To return by the same route that we came by to the harbour, and a party would be sent to meet us if the others reached it before us; or (2) if that were found impracticable, to remain where

we were, and a second party would, at the same time as the other, be sent for us. A record in the former case to be left here for the guidance of the latter.

At mid-day Messrs Torrens and Stafford started, and were soon out of sight. They took with them provisions for twelve days, and their personal effects. The remainder of the food, supposed to be rations for a month, was left for our use, along with the eight dogs, the sledge, and everything else. On examination, however, I found to my horror that most of the pemmican was uneatable, and that in reality we had scarcely enough for a week. We must push on quickly to the harbour, but, remembering the stupendous difficulties, I have little hope. We start to-morrow morning.

August 8.—To-day, two terrible catastrophes have happened. I dare not think of the consequences. In the morning I discovered that the dogs had devoured most of the good meat during the night. Thereafter, when they had been harnessed, they bolted, Reas being on the sledge. Becoming nervous, and thinking they would be sure to return to us, he madly cut the traces. They bolted, and have never been seen since. This knocks our idea of returning overland on the head, and if we have not help within the week, which short of Providence we cannot expect, God help us! I cannot write more fully.

August 9.—Calm and mild day. Explored round about, but could come to no decision but to remain where we were.

August 10.—Our food being almost at an end, to-day we ate some of the bad pemmican. Mine came up; the others now very ill. I cannot bring myself even to hope.

August 11.—Butler died this morning, quite suddenly. Buried him on the other side of the hillock. Others no better. We must soon share his fate unless we are relieved.

August 12.—Being a little stronger this morning, I climbed the high mountain behind this in the expectation of getting a good view. Though the ascent was easy, took seven hours. Saw to the east a green country, with plenty of game. Many volcanoes. If we can only reach it, we have still a chance. Felt very weak while descending, but shot two small birds. On arriving at the cave, I found both Reas and Parr in delirium—they had eaten more of the poisoned meat. Evidently they cannot survive the night.

August 13.—Reas died early this morning, and Parr an hour

later. I am so weak that I cannot drag them outside. No food left. God help me!

August 14.—Am unable to move.

August 15.—

And there the journal ended. The last words were a mere scrawl, barely legible, and had doubtless been written while the unfortunate Collins was at his last gasp. I do not think there was a dry eye in the company when I had finished the pathetic record of how these men had lived and died at this spot.

'Poor fellows!' said the doctor, softly, for the second time. 'Their end was a sad one, and yet they are as truly martyrs to the cause of Arctic discovery as Franklin and Crozier. Peace be to their souls!'

With one consent consideration of the startling information contained in the document was postponed until we had paid the last rites of religion to the men who had awaited them for thirty years. The remains were reverently carried outside and buried beside those of Butler, which we found at the spot indicated; and as I read the service I wondered what those to whom we were doing this last duty would have thought if they had known that more than a quarter of a century was to elapse before it was done. Then the more valuable of the relics were removed to the launch; and before I go farther I may mention that a monument of wood was prepared that evening by Gates, and placed next morning upon the hillock behind which was the grave. The simple inscription on it ran:



ALEXANDER COLLINS,
THOMAS BUTLER,
JOHN REAS,
JAMES PARR,

*Who died in the cause of Arctic Discovery,
August 11-15, 1856.*

'Now,' I said, when these ceremonies were over—by which time it was far on in the afternoon—and we had seated ourselves round the portable stove for a council, the officers close in, the men a little farther back—'now, what are we to gather from this diary?'

The doctor, as all of us had expected, was the first to speak.

'I've been thinking over it,' he said, reflectively, 'and I really cannot see that it throws much light on the mystery. Indeed, I question if it does not deepen it. We find that Messrs Stafford and Torrens leave four men of a sledging-party at a certain point, with the promise to return for them. By the 15th of August all those men are dead; on the 17th (according to the record we found at Weymouth Harbour) the vessel sailed for England. From this it is evident that there has either been the most cowardly desertion on the part of these gentlemen, or that there are circumstances of which we know nothing. I understand'—addressing Cecil and me—'that Mr Randolph Torrens was a man of the highest honour?'

We made an emphatic motion of assent.

'Then I confess I can't comprehend it. I'm afraid this must remain a mystery so far as we're concerned, unless, indeed, we can learn something of that vessel that went down—the *Northern Pharos*—and find a clue in that. For my own part'—with a suggestive shrug of the shoulders—'I give up surmise on the present basis.'

'I fear you're right, doctor,' I replied. 'But as to Randolph Torrens, I'm certain that he was as incapable of leaving to certain death the poor fellows we have just buried as of highway robbery. If he had done so, no condemnation would have been too strong for him. Of this Stafford we know nothing, but we may identify him by judicious inquiry when we return.'

'Might he not have some connection with that *Northern Pharos*?' inquired Wemyss.

This had already occurred to us, but had been put aside as improbable.

'Maybe,' said Cecil; 'but what is really wanted is the motive of Randolph Torrens in despatching the expedition. If we get that, it seems to me that we get the key to the whole affair.'

'And,' concluded the doctor, 'nothing is more unlikely than that we shall get that key.'

This being the general opinion, discussion on what had been so often debated before died out after some further unimportant remarks. But our interest in the diary was immediately raised to a higher point than ever by the doctor.

'That being disposed of,' he went on, 'I want to call your attention to something that is far more important to us than what we have just been speaking of;' and he read out the passage under date August 12: '*Saw to the east a green country, with plenty of game. Many volcanoes. If we can only reach it, we have still a chance.*'

This, of course, had attracted our notice on being read the first time, but had been banished from our minds by subsequent events. Now, on being quoted with significance by Lorimer, we saw at once the full importance of the few words.

'That can mean nothing but what it says,' he continued—'that on the other side of the mountains is a country better than this. There's no ambiguity about it; "a green country, with plenty of game," is plain enough. But'—seeing the excitement into which we had been thrown by the possibilities conjured up by the words—'we mustn't forget that the man was at death's door when he wrote it, and, like his comrades, may have been a little out of his mind.'

'I don't believe it!' cried Cecil, emphatically. 'There's not the least sign of insanity in the whole journal, and I shall trust in it till the opposite is proved!'

'Certainly,' said the doctor, quietly; 'but what I mean to point out is that we mustn't be too sanguine, else we may be disappointed. For there's only one thing to be done, and that is to verify Collins's statement by ascending the mountain to-morrow morning. Till then—till we see what lies beyond—we mustn't give our imaginations too much rope.'

'So be it,' I said; and, shortly afterwards, the only sound to be heard in our little camp was the musical murmur of the water, interrupted now and again by a less musical snore.

We started next morning with the advent of daylight, Clements and Jansen being left behind to take care of the boats. The ascent, as the diary had informed us, was for the most part easy enough, Mount Stafford swelling gently up until within a thousand feet of the summit, when it became more precipitous. As all of us wore snowshoes, in the use of which we had become proficient during the winter, the snow offered no serious impediment to our progress—indeed, it is a question if it did not facilitate it. In some places it had drifted away altogether, and there we invariably found beds of lava, sometimes composed of large lumps, but oftener of surfaces of smooth clinker.

'Another evidence of volcanic origin,' the doctor said. 'Indeed, I shouldn't be surprised to find that those two peaks, without doubt extinct volcanoes, have been active at no distant date—probably within fifteen hundred or two thousand years.'

I happened to be walking with Gates as he said this, and could not help smiling at the stoker's amazement at the ideas held by our *savant* regarding the calculation of time.

'Curious man, the doctor,' he remarked to me, aside; 'for me, fifteen hundred years would begin to look *rather* far away. But it's not easy to account for other folk's tastes.'

It was not until we had reached a height of nearly four thousand feet that our real difficulties began. Hitherto, owing to the great slope of the mountain, all had been as easy as walking on level ground; but now we had to

experience some genuine alpine climbing, that put to a severe test both our muscles and our wind. Crevices, hidden or visible, had to be jumped or avoided; in some parts the ascent was as nearly perpendicular as it could well be; and in others it was so rough that to advance was almost an impossibility. When the time came for the mid-day meal, of which we partook under the shadow of a gigantic pyramidal mass of rock, we were in such a condition that we regarded with some dismay the work still before us.

'It strikes me,' said Cecil, between two bites at an enormous sandwich, 'that this mountain must have changed considerably since 1856, for I'm dead-beat to know where the easy ascent comes in *now*, or how a dying man like Collins could have gained the top alone in seven hours.'

'He must have mounted by some other route,' I replied; 'and I'm half inclined to think that he skirted it lower down than this, and got round to the other side without ascending to the surmit. He doesn't say he was there, you know; and if he was, I can't imagine how he did it any more than you, Cecil.'

'Couldn't we do the same?' inquired Wemyss.

'We might try, at least. Anything is better than a continuation of this work.'

So, after the doctor had completed some observations in which he was engaged, we made our way round the mountain instead of towards its highest point; and that the suggestion was a good one we found as we went along, for the exercise was much less exhausting, and the obstacles hardly so numerous. In the end, to cut a long story short, we effected the purpose that had brought us there. For a few minutes previous to the successful moment we had been scrambling over a small plateau, on which sharp pieces of rock protruded above the snow, and had been too intent upon our next step to mind our surroundings. Suddenly Konig, who was with us, darted forward with a sharp bark, and we glanced up just in time to see his tail disappear over the edge of the

plateau. Not an instant later a flock of birds rose into the air with a whirr (too quickly, as it happened, for our surprised sportsmen), and then Gates, who had hurried after the dog, uttered an exclamation.

'Mr Oliphant! doctor! look down here!' he cried, speaking in a tone of excitement.

He was standing on the extreme edge, with the returned Konig by his side; and when we had joined him, this is the scene that we saw spread before us like a map. Below, Mount Stafford sloped down even more gently than on the other side, and the lower slopes were not only almost free from snow, but were covered by a dark green growth of vegetation. Before us stretched a narrow but level valley, in which patches of snow alternated with green, the latter being principally by the side of the water that flowed through it. We could just distinguish here and there moving specks that by the aid of our glasses we made out to be game of some kind. The valley was bounded by low hills, but farther back we saw noble peaks of a much greater altitude than that on which we were standing, and on the summits of many of them was the peculiar cloud of smoke that told us they were volcanoes. Through a gap at the upper end of the glen we caught a glimpse of another and apparently larger valley, with the sheen of water and in some parts a mist as of rising steam.

At this scene we gazed as if we feared that, if we removed our eyes from it, it might disappear altogether; and at length the doctor spoke.

'From whatever point Collins saw this,' he said, 'he has certainly described it well. "A green country, with plenty of game." Yes, wherever there's vegetation there's game; and wherever there are both of them we may find—something else. And our luck hasn't deserted us. Don't you see Oliphant Inlet running right up the valley and out of sight at the other end?' and he pointed to the dark streak of water that cut the glen in two. 'How far it's navigable we

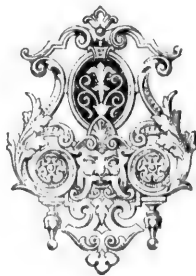
don't know, but I'll wager that we shall at least get up as far as we can see.'

Presently Cecil called our attention to a distant volcano on our right, on an almost direct line with Mount Stafford. It seemed to be in full eruption, the smoke on its top being illuminated by gleams of light every few minutes.

'Allowing for the difference in distance,' he said, 'that resembles the *modus operandi* of the volcano we saw from North-east Valley last autumn, doesn't it?'

'It does, indeed,' I replied; 'and from its position I shouldn't wonder if it really were Mount Cecil Oliphant'—a supposition that was converted into practical certainty by a careful calculation and comparison of different observations.

We should have liked nothing better than to descend at once into the valley that lay before us. But the afternoon was wearing on, and, after taking another long look at the fascinating picture, we were compelled to turn our reluctant steps launchwards. The descent was speedily accomplished, and before long we were telling our comrades what we had seen, and preparing the boats for the attempt to be made on the morrow to penetrate into this oasis in the heart of the Arctic desert.





CHAPTER XIV.

SUCSESSES AND SURPRISES.

NOW,' said Dr Lorimer on the following morning, as we cast off from the bank and headed the launch up stream, 'an hour or two at the most will carry us into the Happy Valley, "where," in the words of the ancient chronicle, "game abounds, and everything points to a bountiful nature."'

But, alas for the doctors reputation as a prophet, our difficulties commenced simultaneously with the voyage. The current was so strong that at full pressure we barely held our own against it, and when two hours had passed, instead of being within the glen, we had not made half a mile from the camp. Worse than this, the inlet narrowed as we advanced, and as a natural consequence the current increased in strength. On either side the walls of rock rose up perpendicularly to an immense height, in some places overhanging the inlet so that only a small patch of sky was to be seen.

'What's to be done, Clements?' I asked, when I saw that we were making practically no progress.

'I don't know, sir,' he answered; 'I've full steam on, and I can do no more with safety. Even as it is, the pressure's as much as she'll stand, though she's as stout a boat as ever I managed.'

We were at that time in the middle of the stream, and the doctor suggested that we might do better if we ran in close to the shore, though the danger of being dashed against the bank was certainly greater. Accordingly we made for the left or

Mount Torrens side, on which, as we came nearer, we noticed that there was a broad ledge just above the water-line.

Clements looked critically at this.

'Couldn't you help her forward a little by towing or warping?' he inquired.

'It's hardly feasible, I think,' I said; 'but we may as well try it.'

We did so, and the result far exceeded our expectations. The landing was effected with difficulty, ropes warped to a point of rock some distance in front, and then all hands, except Clements and Wemyss, who were required on board, pulled as if their lives depended upon it. Whether it was that the current was much less fierce inshore, or that our efforts really went for something, I cannot pretend to say; but, at anyrate, the two boats assuredly gained several hundred feet with comparative ease. In this way, taking advantage of one fixed point after another, we continued for some time, and although our progress was nothing to boast of, still we had no reason to be discouraged.

A little farther up the inlet broadened out once more, and to our relief we were able to get on without extraneous aid. Here it was seen to take a sudden bend, and as we approached the turn we heard a distant sound as of a fall.

'If it is a fall, we're done for!' I said. 'We shall have to turn back at once.'

'*Nil desperandum!*' responded the doctor, cheerfully. 'The water is not so agitated as it should be if there's a fall near. But patience! a couple of minutes will put us out of suspense.'

The bend being somewhat difficult to navigate, and the sound momentarily becoming louder, we were quite excited by the time we had taken the turn. And then we saw the cause of the noise. A body of water issued from a cleft at least five hundred feet up the side of Mount Torrens, and fell into Oliphant Inlet with a din that seemed scarcely proportionate to its size. From where we were it looked like

a ribbon of white mist on the mountain-side, but as we came nearer it assumed a more formidable appearance.

'There must be a strong eddy there,' said the doctor, 'and I'm afraid it won't be altogether easy to pass it without being sucked in.—Clements, you'd better keep her as much to starboard as you can with safety.'

Fortunately, the current was comparatively weak at that side, and Clements was thus enabled to get up way for a rush when we reached the critical point. The moment we came abreast the eddying and foam-crested water, we dashed forward at full speed. For an instant it seemed as if it would be of no avail. The launch's head spun round towards the left and vacillated; but finally she righted herself and, after a shock that reminded us of the old ice-pressures, gained the calm water beyond. In the face of our success, we did not heed the fact that we were all drenched by the falling spray.

That, as it happened, was the last of our troubles, and thereafter we advanced slowly but surely, and without meeting any further obstacle, until the mountains on each side began gradually to recede. Within an hour of sunset we had reached the valley, and the occasion was signalled by the shooting of a brace of eider-ducks by Cecil. Larger game we saw also, but it was too dark to make out of what kind. At the first patch of green by the river-side (for the term inlet must now give way to river), which we found to be of coarse grass interspersed with moss, we made our camp, and had a royal supper in celebration of our arrival in Dreghorn Valley.

Some time during the night I was awakened by a sound outside the tent; and, stepping out of the sleeping-bag without rousing the rest, I took my gun and proceeded to investigate. For a little I could see nothing, so intense was the darkness, and then I distinguished a dark mass by the water-side. The animals—whatever they were—must have scented me at the same time, for immediately thereafter they

scampered off in the opposite direction. I fired at random, with what result I could not guess. After reassuring my comrades, who had been brought out in a state of great alarm by the sound of my shot, we all turned in, and slept soundly till dawn.

That I had done some execution, after all, was evident next morning from the track of blood that was visible for some distance. Before breakfast Cecil, with the help of Konig, had made a welcome addition to that meal by again bagging a few birds.

'We're in a perfect paradise of game, apparently,' he said, 'and I think we should have a regular hunt as soon as we can. I should like to find out what kind of herd it was that disturbed us last night.'

'Let us get farther up the valley first,' I answered; 'there appears to be more game there, and it would be a pity to waste our time here.'

To this he assented, and shortly afterwards we resumed our voyage.

That day the temperature was higher than it had been since the preceding year, and as we steamed gently up the glen, with the green banks on each side and many signs of animal life all around, we could almost imagine ourselves on an autumn tour in Norway or some other European country. We noticed numerous seals basking on the rocks as we passed, and hares appeared to be plentiful enough on land; but the only kind of big game we saw during the forenoon was a herd of musk-oxen. Cecil wished to go ashore, and was only kept on board by the promise that we should stop the next time.

By noon we were near a peculiarly shaped flat-topped rock about ten miles up, and when we were within a few hundred yards of it Cecil pointed out an object under its western side that had hitherto escaped our attention. It was circular in form, and half hidden by some masses of rock; in front of it was a little stream that ran into the

river; but even with our glasses we could not make out what it was.

'I'm at an utter loss,' said the doctor; 'but, of course, it's unrecognisable at this distance. Is it worth while to run in?'

'Certainly it is,' I replied, and gave orders to that effect.

As we came nearer, the object assumed a more definite shape, but still we could form no conjecture. At length the doctor, after a long scrutiny of it through the best telescope, hazarded an opinion. 'It seems to me,' he said, hesitatingly, as if afraid of his own thought, 'that it's a ruined stone hut, or at least an old habitation of some kind.'

Every one on board was startled by the suggestion, and at first seemed half-inclined to scoff at it; but then, on looking again at the mysterious object, we were forced to confess that its appearance certainly corresponded with that of a hut. But all doubts were soon put to rest by the launch touching land. The doctor was the first to jump ashore and rush towards the spot, which he reached while the rest of us were still some distance off.

'It is a hut!' he shouted a moment later.

The news caused us to make for him at an increased speed. When we came up, we saw that there could not be the least doubt of the matter. The building was of large and small pieces of rock placed together in the same way as a dry-stone wall, and covered on the outside with moss and lichen. The roof had fallen in; otherwise, the hut was quite entire. It was about thirty feet in circumference, and eight or nine in height; there was a pretty large doorway, and two openings as if for windows; and inside there were the marks of a fireplace in the centre, along with some bones and other refuse.

'I may be mistaken,' observed Dr Lorimer, after a careful inspection of the whole place, 'but I'm of the strong opinion that this wasn't built by Esquimaux. The plan of the building no doubt resembles their snow-houses, but it is so well built and proportioned that I cannot credit them

with it. If it *is* their work, all I can say is that they are more highly endowed than we have hitherto imagined.'

'But if it wasn't Esquimaux,' I said, 'whom could it have been?'

'That I don't know,' he replied, 'and there is really nothing to indicate.'

'Has it been long built?' Cecil asked.

'I cannot answer that either, but I should say at no distant date.'

I saw Gates smile at this, and remembered that Lorimer had used the same words on the preceding day. Presently the stoker quietly inquired of me: 'Is that fifteen hundred or two thousand years, Mr Oliphant?'

'No, my boy,' answered the doctor, who heard him; 'it means in this case—volcanoes and huts being different things—within a decade or so.'

'Within a decade or so!' I repeated; 'then the chances are that this land is inhabited?'

'Indubitably; but perhaps like Greenland, merely by a few wandering tribes that are as few and far between as frivolous Scotsmen'—at which Gates grinned, as an honest compliment to himself and his compatriots. 'However, we must now keep a keen lookout for natives or further signs of them; and in the meantime I propose, as there is no more to be done here, that we resume our journey.'

This incident, naturally, added a still further excitement to our voyage, and many were the inferences and anticipations founded upon it for the next hour or two. They did not end, in fact, until Cecil (who had been keeping his eyes open extraordinarily wide for reasons of his own) sighted some game in the distance, and claimed the fulfilment of my promise. His hunting instinct had been steadily rising all day, and now he would take no refusal, the rather that the game did not appear to be musk-oxen or any other species we had met so far. I had to give in; and after issuing orders for the launch to go no farther than

could be seen from that point, a distance of perhaps three miles, he and I took our guns and two of the dogs, and set off to commence our stalking.

About half a mile from the river the valley began to rise, and the ground became very broken; and as it was in this part that the game had been seen, we made for it lower down than the exact spot. Owing to the conformation of the surface, they were invisible to us for the greater distance, and it was not until we were within some seven hundred yards that we caught sight of them again. Then, to our amazement, we saw that they were *deer*—animals that we no more expected to find there than we did hippopotami.

'Do you see that?' whispered Cecil, excitedly. 'If we can only manage to get within range, what a feast of venison we shall have to-night, and what a trophy that stag's head will be for the doctor!'

The herd, consisting of nine animals, mostly young, were peacefully browsing on a green patch of vegetation around a spring from which steam was rising. So graceful did they look with their long, branching horns and beautiful skins, and so oblivious of danger did they seem, that I felt a pang of compunction at the idea of shooting them. As Cecil, however, did not share my scruples, we proceeded to creep from rock to rock with the wariness of redskins, doing our utmost to make no noise and at the same time to keep the dogs in hand. But all our precautions were of no avail. While we were still about six hundred yards from them they appeared to scent their imminent danger, and without a warning dashed off to the east.

'Fire!' cried my brother, jumping up and letting fly at them.

I followed his example; but, as may be supposed, we might as well have kept our shot for a better opportunity. Half-inclined to curse our luck, we hurried forward to the oasis, the vegetation of which we found to be a finer grass than we had yet come across. The spring was, as we had

imagined, of boiling water, and resembled that on the other side of Mount Stafford. But we did not stop to pay much attention to it, for, seeing that the game had again come to a halt about a quarter of a mile farther on, we resumed our hunt. A second time they bolted before we were within range; but on this occasion, observing that their speed was nothing very phenomenal, we set the dogs free and hurried after them as fast as we could. The deer made straight for a ridge of rock that ran across the valley transversely with the river; but on reaching it they swerved suddenly and unexpectedly to the right and took to the hills, still hotly pursued by Konig and Antony.

'Something must have startled them,' said Cecil. 'The launch can't have come up yet, can it?'—for, being on low ground, and the river being hidden, we could not make sure.

'Hardly likely,' I replied; 'but suppose we go on? There's not the least use in following the deer farther; we should never overtake them; and the dogs will come back as soon as they see we aren't at their heels.'

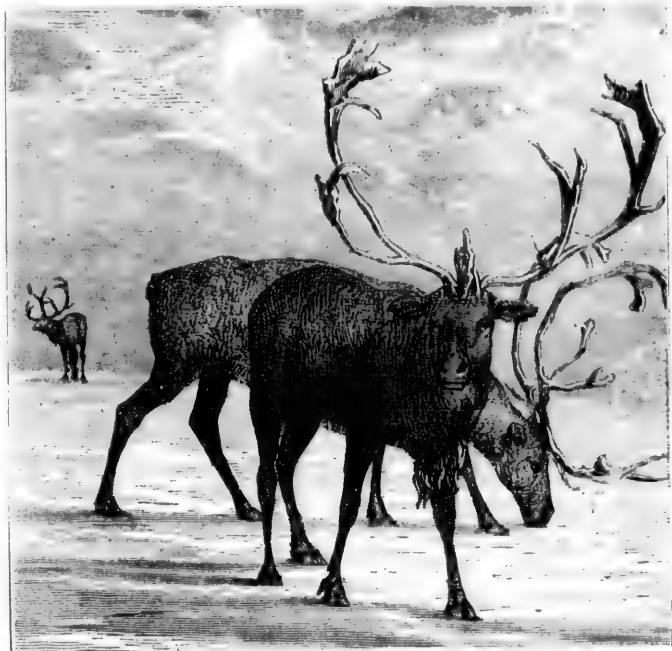
For a moment Cecil looked disappointed, for he would have liked nothing better than a long chase.

'It's a pity to lose them after all this trouble,' he said, 'but I'm afraid there's nothing else for it. And we may see something else before the day's done.'

In a few minutes thereafter we were at the base of the ridge, and then we began to ascend it at the very point at which the deer had turned. But before we were halfway up we heard a sound that caused us to stop and look at each other in complete amazement; for, if it was not the sound of clashing steel, it was as like it as anything we had ever heard. After a moment's pause, and as if moved by one impulse, we resumed our climbing. My brother was the first to reach the top; I saw him, as his head rose above the ridge, glance down on the other side with a look of bewilderment, open his mouth as if to speak, and then motion me to

hurry up. A second later I was at his side, and this is what my hurried glimpse revealed. Down below, about a hundred yards from us, was a party of armed men, apparently white like ourselves, clothed in bearskins and with swords and shields, surrounding another man clothed and armed in the same way, who, standing in a cleft in the side of the valley, seemed to be holding his own against them all. I had just time to notice this, and that they were assuredly not of Esquimaux origin, when it appeared to me that one of the men turned in our direction; and, apprehensive of the effects of being seen, I hastily dropped down out of sight, pulling Cecil with me.

'Get the guns ready,' I whispered; 'I'm sure he saw us.'



Reindeer.



CHAPTER XV.

EYVIND.

A FEW minutes passed, and we were not disturbed. Then we heard a second time the loud clash of steel, followed by the long, agonising cry of some poor fellow who had received his death-thrust; and, our curiosity overmastering our prudence, we climbed again to our old point of vantage.

We perceived at a glance that the one attacked still held his place; before him lay the man he had just despatched, and around him thronged six others, all of them, by the expressions on their faces, thirsting for his blood. He himself was a splendid specimen of manhood, standing at least six feet. Seemingly he was not more than twenty-four or twenty-five years of age; and with his long yellow hair and moustache, and his ruddy countenance, he might have been taken for one of the old Saxon or Norse conquerors of early Britain come to life. Above a dress of some dark material he wore a magnificent bearskin, thrown back over his shoulders so as to allow his arms full play. His headpiece was of ermine, ornamented with three feathers. His only arms were a long sword and a small round shield; but beside him on the ground lay several peculiar-shaped spears, which, as we afterwards gathered, had been thrown at him and caught on his shield, thence rebounding harmlessly to the earth. Fortunately for himself, his place of defence was so skilfully chosen that he could not have more than two of his opponents before him at a time, and thus he was enabled to defend himself with some hope of success.

We could not but admire the masterly way in which he wielded his weapons, now receiving a thrust on his shield, the next moment parrying one with his sword, and at the same time pressing the enemy back by a well-directed lunge. Our sympathies were of course immediately with him, for we thought it almost impossible that, however long he might hold out, he could ultimately escape.

Of the assailants, the only one who seemed to be of the same rank, and who also wore the three feathers in his cap, was a middle-aged man, who appeared to direct the attack from behind, always taking care not to come within the range of his foeman's weapon. He was identically armed; but his five men had long spears instead of swords, and three of them had also by their sides the smaller kinds, which they were doubtless keeping for a good opportunity of hurling at Fairhair. These five were darker than the other two, and had many points of variance that in some respects indicated a different race.

For the moment there was a lull in the combat, and while it lasted we had an opportunity of taking in the whole scene. At the foot of the valley was the river, of which there was a good view from where we were; and farther up, about midway between it and us, was a hut resembling the one we had already seen, but apparently complete. There were a few patches of green here and there, but for the most part the glen was bare and sterile.

'There they go again!' whispered Cecil, while I was scrutinising the river for some signs of the boats.

Turning, I saw that the combat had recommenced. Apparently a more determined effort than ever was now to be made. One of the two leaders suddenly rushed forward and engaged Fairhair with his spear; and while he was doing so the other attacked him in flank, as if to take him by surprise. But Fairhair saw him, and by one lightning-like stroke dashed up the spear of the first; the next instant, received the second's point on his shield; and then, lunging forward

so quickly that his opponent could not get out of the way, brought down his sword with the full force of his arm. Dropping his spear, the man tried to parry the stroke with his shield, but the only effect was to turn it from his head to his shoulder. He fell, and doubtless another thrust would have given him his *coup de grace* if his comrade had not again attacked Fairhair, and thus called off his attention. Simultaneously we noticed one of the men farther back hastily throw his short spear; but, notwithstanding his other engagement, Fairhair saw him also, and by a sudden jump easily avoided it.

'Well done!' cried Cecil, in a tone louder than was altogether prudent, and fingering his Winchester as if he longed to be in it with the rest.

Hitherto we had been too much interested in the fight to think of our own position; but now I could not help wondering if it would not be better to return to the launch than to remain there. It is true we were in little danger of being engaged against our will, for the combatants had something else to do than to keep their eyes on all parts of the compass; but still it was a question if it would not be more prudent to creep quietly away and prepare our friends for what was before them. I whispered my doubts to Cecil; but in reply he energetically shook his head.

'No, no,' he said. 'Let us see it out; I don't intend to let those beggars get it all their own way. Besides, there's no danger.'

I acquiesced, and no doubt everything would have gone well had it not been for an event which we might have foreseen, but did not—the return of the dogs from the pursuit of the deer. In fact we quite forgot all about them until we were unpleasantly reminded of their presence by their noses being thrust into our faces. Cecil promptly took Antony by the throat, and so ensured his quiescence; but I was less fortunate with Konig, who eluded my grasp, and, as if to mark his indignation at our conduct, gave two or three loud barks

of defiance. This, of course, brought matters to a head. Before we could drop down out of sight, even if we had wished to do so, some of the combatants had turned and seen us, and their bearing plainly warned us that we need expect no friendly reception.

'We'll have to face it now, at all events!' cried Cecil, in any tone but that of disappointment; and, with a cry to me to 'Come on,' he lowered himself into the valley in which the combat was taking place. Though inwardly I blamed his foolhardiness in mixing in an affair with which he had no concern, I had no alternative but to follow him.

On seeing this move of ours, the officer in command of the attacking party gave us one startled glance, and said something to his men. Two of them immediately turned, so as to face us, leaving the remaining two (not counting the wounded man) to engage Fairhair. Thereafter he shouted a remark evidently intended for us; but, as we did not understand him, we could return no answer.

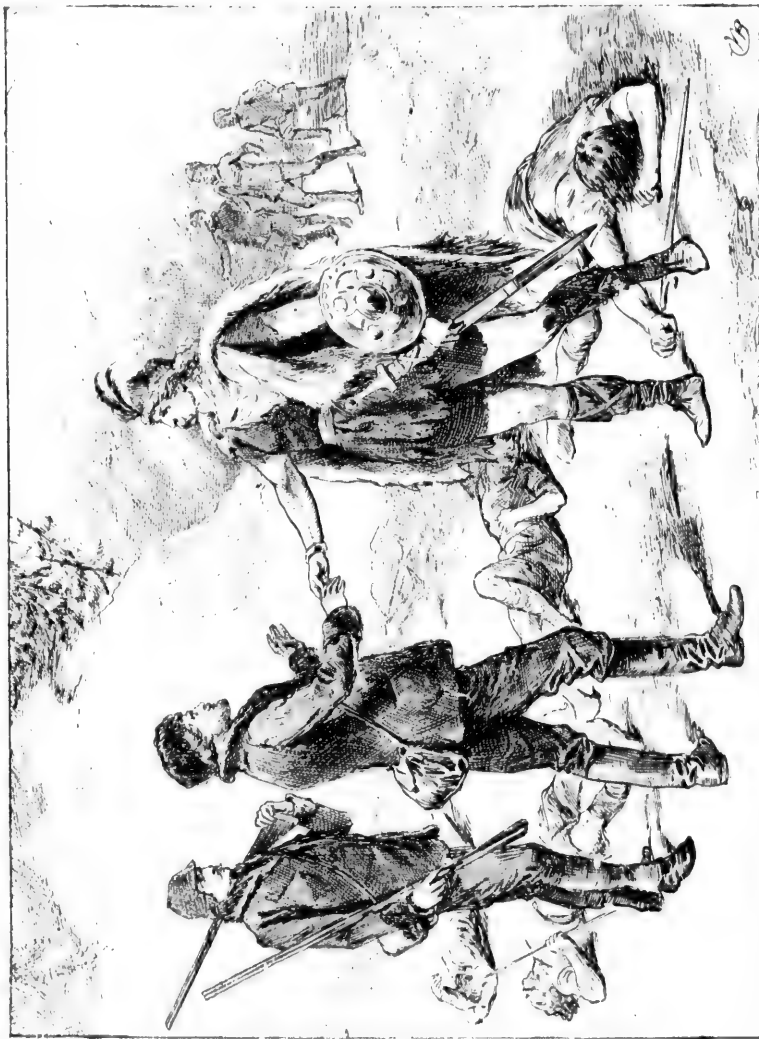
After a short pause he issued an order, and then, with his two men, advanced in an unmistakably threatening manner. We raised our guns in menace, but, as they paid no heed, it was plain that they were unacquainted with their power. Suddenly the hand of one of them wandered to the short spear at his side; half a second later I was jerked aside so unexpectedly by my brother that I nearly fell; and, almost simultaneously, the spear flashed past within half a foot of me. In a minute they would have been upon us, and as it would have been simple madness to allow them, armed as they were, to come to close quarters, we fired together. The two men fell, while the officer threw himself on the ground with a shriek as if he, too, had received a conical bullet through the body.

So far the defender and his opponents had been too much occupied with their own concerns to look at us; but now, as they heard the sound of our shots for the first time in their lives, they stopped in sheer consternation. But Fairhair

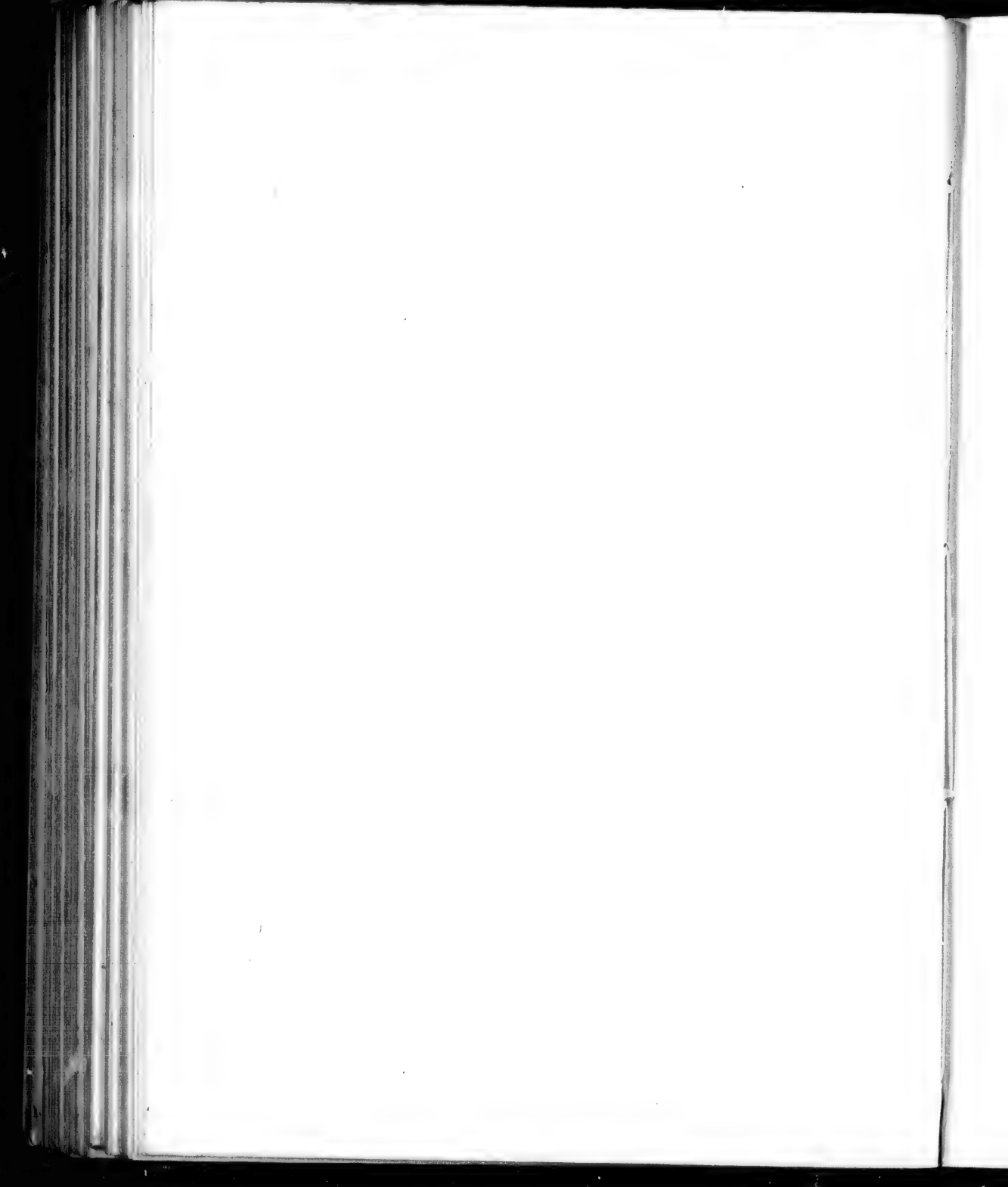
didn't take long to realise that our arrival had immensely simplified matters for him; and while his two assailants were still looking as if dumbfounded, he darted forward, broke through the guard of one of them, and passed his sword through his body. The other, though now no match for him, pluckily continued the fight, but in a second he also had shared the fate of his comrade.

Now ensued an extraordinary scene. The officer, finding himself unhurt, had risen; and Fairhair, altogether heedless of our presence, rushed forward to where he stood, with a shout that sounded to me like one of joy. The other seemed not to like the prospect (especially with us at his back), but he faced his enemy gallantly enough, and answered his shouts with others equally defiant. For a little they stood thus, and then the conflict began. They were equally matched, for if Fairhair had the advantage in weight, the other had it in freshness; and there, with the dead bodies around them, and we two as spectators, they exchanged thrust after thrust and blow after blow with fearful rapidity. We could not tell which, if either, had the best of it; and it is doubtful how it would have ended if they had been left to fight it out. But just then, as luck would have it, we heard the familiar sound made by our little steamer, which soon after came into sight at the foot of the valley. Its appearance was too much for the duellists, and they dropped the points of their swords and made as if to flee. But only Fairhair's opponent did so; and Fairhair himself, quickly recovering when he saw his foeman's back, lifted one of the short throwing-spears that lay on the ground, and with unerring aim hurled it at him. He fell, and when we got forward to him he was quite dead, with the point of the javelin sticking out a full inch in front.

The launch, meanwhile, had been run inshore, and those on board seemed to be in a state of great excitement, probably having witnessed the final act of the Homeric struggle. Turning to Fairhair, we observed him alternately scrutinising



Fairhair sheathed his sword, and with a look of frank confidence took my hand and shook it heartily.



us and our vessel with a look in which wonder was blended with fear, and we were afraid (and, as he afterwards confessed, we were right) he was thinking of showing us a clean pair of heels. But, doubtless remembering the help we had rendered him, and that *he* had no cause to fear us, he advanced slowly and hesitatingly, as if his mind still wavered. Seeing this, and noticing also that he cast furtive glances at our fire-arms, I passed mine to Cecil, and went to meet him with outstretched hand. At this his fear seemed to vanish; he sheathed his sword, and with a look of frank confidence took my hand and shook it heartily. Notwithstanding the rifles, he went through the same ceremony with Cecil, and then addressed us both in some language we did not understand.

While we were thus becoming friendly the doctor came up, followed by all the others except Gates, and in a few words we made him acquainted with what had passed.

'It's obvious enough that he's no more of Esquimaux breed than we are,' he said, when he had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to allow him to speak; 'and what he is, and where he belongs to, we must get out of him somehow or other.' After a minute's thought: 'Leave him to me, Oliphant, and I'll do my best. I think I shall manage. Perhaps, in the meantime, you and Cecil may find that some of these men are not quite dead.'

After this gentle hint he turned to Fairhair, who had been regarding him (and especially his eye-glasses) with an expression of unadulterated wonder; while we, quite content to leave matters of this kind in his hands, proceeded to examine the stranger's victims—and our own. All were dead except two, and one of these expired in the course of a few minutes. As for the other—the one who had received Fairhair's stroke on his shoulder—he also succumbed after lingering little more than an hour, though Cecil did everything in his power to save him.

Leaving my brother to attend to this, and perceiving that Lorimer was still engaged with our native, I turned to our

three comrades, who looked as if they thought they were dreaming.

'What does it all mean?' inquired Wemyss, with a bewildered glance, first at the bodies, and then at the gesticulating doctor and his listener.

'That's more than I can tell, Wemyss,' I replied; 'all that I know is that we came up in time to take part in a fight between our friend there and several others whom you now see on the ground. Who they are, the doctor is trying to find out.'

'Old sea-Northmen,' suggested Nils Jansen, looking approvingly at Fairhair's goodly proportions, and apparently quite roused out of his usual lethargic state.

The same idea had occurred to me, and certainly our new friend came very near one's mental picture of a viking. But before I had time to pursue the conjecture further, he moved towards us with the doctor.

'Can't altogether classify him yet, Oliphant,' said the latter, 'but I don't despair. If I could only get him to speak slower I might succeed better. But by his signs I make out that he wishes us to accompany him to his hut.'

This, it may be remembered, was situated farther down the valley, and thither we went at once at Fairhair's heels. When we reached it, we found that it was considerably larger than the one in Dreghorn Valley—capable, indeed, of accommodating the seven of us without the least inconvenience. It had curtains of sealskin for both door and windows, those for the latter being held back by loops of skin fastened to points in the wall. In the centre was the fireplace, and around the wall a raised platform of beaten earth, part of it covered with furs as for a bed. Here and there were spears, knives, and freshly-stripped skins of various animals. The purpose of the building was evident.

'A hunting-hut!' exclaimed the doctor. 'It's easily enough seen that it isn't a permanent residence—only something, I presume, equivalent to a shooting-box.'

Meanwhile its owner had motioned us to be seated, after which he had gone outside, returning immediately with several pieces of venison, which there and then he proceeded to cook over the fire. When they were done, he brought from a corner four platters ingeniously formed of stone, and four metal drinking-vessels. These he handed to the doctor, Cecil, Wemyss, and me, at the same time saying something which was doubtless meant as an apology for not being able to supply us altogether. The cups he filled from a large jar, also of metal, produced from the same corner; and with the venison we each received a piece of some dark substance which on examination we discovered to be *rye-bread*!

'Rye-bread here!' ejaculated Lorimer, in a tone, not of surprise—for we were past that—but of wondering perplexity.

'*And ale,*' supplemented Cecil.

And on tasting the liquor we found that it was certainly ale, though neither in taste nor appearance did it resemble the English drink.

Hardly knowing what to make of the discoveries, we ate on in silence, but I saw that the doctor was deep in meditation. When our repast was finished, Clements and Jansen were entertained likewise, and then Fairhair himself, after having drunk a cupful of the beer to us, again shook us all cordially by the hand.

'I see it now,' said Cecil. 'This has been a sort of eating of salt, you know, and after it we are to be friends everlasting!'

'Then, to ratify the treaty, we must get him down to the launch,' I said.

By means of signs we succeeded, with some difficulty, in making him understand what was wanted. He seemed quite willing, having by this time, no doubt, conquered his reasonable fears; but while we were on our way he turned aside into a little valley that struck off parallel with the river. Here, in a minute or two, we came upon the bodies of two

men pierced by javelins, and, seeing Fairhair's grief, we concluded that they had been his followers, and probably killed by his own assailants. Having helped him to bury them, we were led down to a little cove, in which lay two boats, one about twelve feet long and the other above sixteen, made of fir—and exceedingly well made they were, too. The sterns were considerably higher than the prows, and the latter tapered almost to a point.

‘Wood also,’ I heard the doctor mutter to himself. ‘And where on earth have I seen boats like these before?’

Before he had answered the question to his own satisfaction, apparently, we were on board the launch, and of Fairhair's wonder at everything he saw I need say no more than that it was, judging from the expression on his face and in his eyes, and from his incessant remarks, boundless. Hitherto, I think, he had regarded us as superhuman, but now he appeared to be convinced of our mundane origin by the shape of the whale-boat and by the goods it contained, and perhaps also by the excellent biscuits, hot coffee, and other delicacies with which we regaled him. And yet, on looking at the vessel, that went without any visible effort on our part, and remembering how strangely and mysteriously we had killed his enemies, his mind could not help vacillating a little.

While we were thus doing the honours of our boats to the best of our ability, the doctor was unusually preoccupied. The only things he seemed to pay any attention to were the frequent exclamations of our visitor, and for the rest he was completely lost in thought. At length, quite suddenly, I saw his face lighten up as it always did when he had come to any conclusion or decision, and then I knew he had struck upon a plan of some kind.

‘I have it!’ he exclaimed, so energetically that Fairhair's hand involuntarily wandered to his sword.

Without condescending to explain any further, he slowly and distinctly said something to the stranger in a language

with which we were unacquainted. Fairhair pricked up his ears, looked puzzled, and then said a few words, but whether in the same language or not we could not make out.

The doctor answered, and so it went on for a long time without any of us becoming the wiser.

'I have succeeded!' cried Lorimer at last, breaking off his conversation for a few minutes to inform us of the result. 'With difficulty we can understand each other. Those boats put the idea into my head, for I remembered to have seen somewhat similar ones dug up in Norway about twenty years ago. Then I recognised in his exclamations one or two words of Icelandic, and all at once it flashed on me that it might be of Norse origin. So I tried him with Icelandic, and though it took him some time to comprehend it, he eventually did so in a way. Now I've found out wherein the difference lies, and before to-morrow I'll undertake to master his dialect;' and here he went into details into which it is needless to enter in this place, the more so that the subject will be exhaustively treated in a scientific work which Dr Lorimer has in preparation. The gist of them was that the original tongue had become corrupted somehow or other, and that now it was so changed that almost all the terminals were different from those of the Icelandic.

'But even that, I understand,' he continued, 'isn't the common language—it was certainly not the one in which he spoke to us first. His own name, he tells me, is Eyvind. I've had no time yet to ferret out anything more, but we're on the brink of great discoveries, Oliphant—discoveries, unless I'm mistaken, that'll surprise the world!'

Here an idea struck me.

'Nils is a Norwegian,' I said. 'Are the languages near enough for them to understand each other, do you think?'

'I fear not,' he answered, 'but we might try.'

Nils Jansen, who was below, was called up and told to speak to Eyvind—to call him now by his proper name—in Norwegian, but the experiment was unsuccessful. There

were indeed words common to both, but these were so few, and the structure and pronunciation had become so different, that the two were unintelligible to each other.

'Just as I thought,' observed Lorimer; adding: 'And now, if you'll leave us to ourselves for an hour or two, I don't doubt I shall be able to give you some information at the end of the time.'

And, turning to Eyvind, he resumed his conversation with him, while the rest of us, thinking over the wonderful occurrences and revelations of the day, conjectured if we were in reality about to discover, in this far-off Arctic land, a race kindred to our own.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAND OF ISLÖKEN.

THE conversation between Dr Lorimer and Eyvind, in spite of the difficulties of carrying it on, continued for the best part of two hours; and then the latter, after a general salutation to the company, leaped on shore and made his way up the valley towards his hut.

‘He’s off,’ explained the doctor, ‘to make things ready for accompanying us to-morrow morning. Till then we’re to remain here. And, really, we *have* something to see, if we’re to believe what he says—a country inhabited by thousands of people, many hundreds of miles in extent, and capable, as we already know, of producing corn and wood! That’s what I gather from what he says, for he was much more eager to ask me questions than to answer them. He wished to know everything about us—where we came from, what our purpose was, how I had learned his language, and so on—and I had to gratify him. He is a savage, in many respects, but assuredly an intelligent one. In the end he agreed to guide us into this land, from the people of which, he says, we are sure of a hospitable reception.’

‘So far, so good,’ I said; ‘but how did he explain his little quarrel with his countrymen, as I suppose they were?’

‘In this way. It seems he is now the head of a family which has long been at feud—like the old Highland chiefs, I suppose—with a neighbouring one. A few years ago he

happened to kill a member of the opposite family, and since that time there has been war to the knife between them. Eyvind's side has had the best of it, and to such an extent that of a numerous sept of foes there ultimately remained only one, who took to flight. A few days ago our friend came down here with two attendants to hunt the seal'—which, we were subsequently told, frequented only this and a few other estuaries—'and, unsuspecting of danger, kept no particular watch. But his enemy, who was named Thestar, had been following him, and the first warning Eyvind had of his approach was the death of his men, which he saw from a distance. He was chased and hemmed in at the point at which you found him, and there he held his own against them all until you came up and effectually aided him in exterminating the family.'

'If that is their usual way of settling disputes,' said Cecil, 'their country must be a particularly nice place to live in. No doubt they make up for the temperature by extra warmth of temperament. And our friend Eyvind seems a good specimen of the noble savage, to whom might is right.'

The noble savage was at anyrate an early riser, for we found when we awoke on the following morning that he had already removed his goods and chattels from the hut to his boat, and was engaged in placing in the other the arms and accoutrements of his slain enemies.

'He says,' the doctor informed us when he had made inquiries, 'that he must prove in this way that he has really been victorious. Otherwise he mightn't be believed. He also wants to know if the "iron magic-boat," as he calls it, can drag another boat, as the management of his own will be quite enough for him.'

'Certainly,' I replied. 'Both of them if he likes, if the current is not too strong'—an offer which he accepted at once.

It must have appeared a strange fleet that started from the tiny river-side cove early that forenoon—the powerful little

launch leading, followed by the well-packed whale-boat and the two peculiar-looking native vessels.

Eyvind, who lost no time in making himself quite at home on deck, had an insatiable curiosity regarding the nature and use of every article on board; and though his mind failed to grasp much of the information liberally supplied to him, that did not prevent him overwhelming the doctor with puzzling questions.

Lorimer by this time was perfectly fluent in Eyvind's dialect, and the cross-fire of query and reply went unceasingly on hour by hour. Nils Jansen, too, strangely enough, soon picked up as much as made himself understood, merely by listening attentively to the conversation; but then, like many of his compatriots, he had a wonderful faculty for acquiring languages.

As we continued on our way up the valley we saw still further evidence on every side of plentiful game, and even caught sight of several bears. Of course, all kinds of animals fled at our approach long before we could get within shot, and we were so eager to proceed quickly that not even Cecil suggested another chase. But he kept his rifle near at hand, and his eyes open, and when he did observe a flock of brant geese hovering over the water within a hundred yards of us, he took immediate advantage of the chance. In an instant the fowling-piece was at his shoulder and he had fired, and so truly that he managed to bring down two of the birds. They fell on the water, and we easily recovered them.

Eyvind had watched the proceedings with the greatest interest up to the moment that Cecil pulled the trigger, and then, as he heard and saw the result, he gasped in pure astonishment.

'Ye are gods!' he exclaimed at last to the doctor. 'None but gods have such power over fire and thunder as ye, or can kill without arrow or spear! Ye must be gods!'

And in this belief he persisted in remaining thenceforth, and I may only remark, incidentally, that he was further

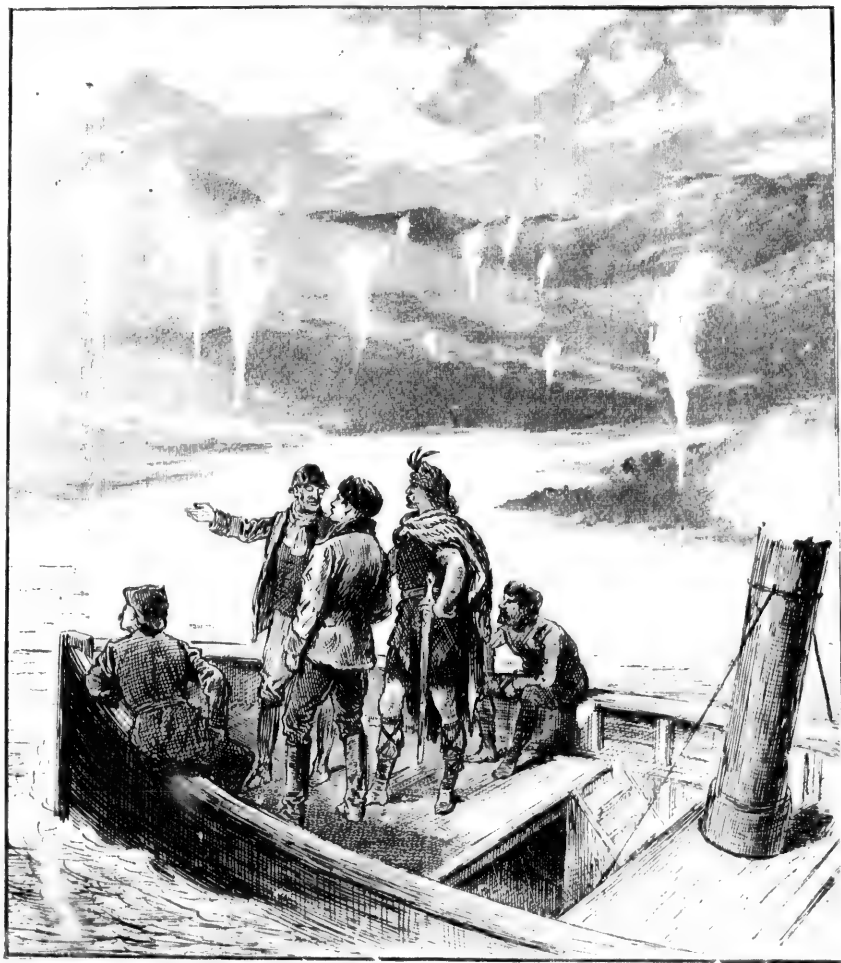
confirmed in it on seeing several of us smoking—a proceeding which gave him more uneasiness than even our method of slaughter.

All forenoon the valley had been gradually widening out; and soon after this incident—before, indeed, Eyvind had completely recovered from its effects—we came to a point at which it merged altogether in another and larger one. Hitherto we had been prevented from seeing beyond by rising ground; but now, on turning a bend in the river, we saw before us a scene that in its magnificence, unexpected as it was, almost deprived us of the use of our senses. On both sides lay a level plain stretching away to distant mountains, covered almost entirely by a mantle of green, with only here and there a streak of white that seemed an anomaly amidst the surrounding verdure. In sight were several houses, mostly standing a little back from the water; and here and there we observed herds of either game or cattle. A few miles in front of us was a lake, from which the river issued, and on the farther side of it the varying scenery of

Mountains that like giants stand
To sentinel enchanted land.

But the principal feature of the foreground was neither the inhabited plain nor its highly-cultivated appearance, but the great numbers of what could be nothing else than *geysers* that were visible on all sides. Of the spouting sprays of water, each partly veiled in steam, many of them of a considerable size, there must have been close upon a hundred within an area of a few square miles. In the background, except to the north, we could see snow-covered hills backed by mountains of a great height, at least three of the peaks of which, we noticed, were volcanoes in violent eruption.

‘This is Reyðverá, one of the best and most fertile portions of the land of Islöken,’ explained Eyvind through the doctor, on seeing our surprise. ‘Yonder’—pointing to the north, where there was a break in the mountains—‘extends the



The principal feature of the foreground was the great numbers of what could be nothing else than *geysers* that were visible on all sides.

land many days' journey, to the great mountains which no man has yet crossed. *There*, in Hjalnord, sit the king and chief council of the nation.'

'And,' added the doctor to us, 'whatever its present name, it *should* be called the Paradise of the North;' and thenceforward, amongst ourselves, the land of Islöken—as it appears was the proper designation of the whole country—bore no other name than that thus bestowed upon it.

As we approached the first house, which was a one-storied building of stone, not unlike the rude erections of Iceland, we perceived that there was a goodly number of people standing in front of it, and none of them, by their furtive glances, at their ease. As we came near enough to make out that they resembled the spearmen of whom Eyvind had disposed, and that there were two or three herds of tame reindeer and cattle grazing around the place, a loud, clanging bell began to toll, no doubt to warn others of our arrival. Our savage, obviously not too well pleased by this mark of attention, angrily addressed those on shore as we passed, and the sound immediately ceased. But the natives, men, women, and children alike, after their first feeling of consternation was over, swarmed along on both banks, easily keeping abreast of the boats; and as they were momentarily joined by others from every point of the compass, we seemed likely to have soon a considerable escort.

'How is it, I wonder,' I asked, 'that these people differ so much in every way from Eyvind? They appear to be of another race altogether.'

'Thou art right,' answered Eyvind, when the doctor had put the question to him. 'It is said that ages ago a people came over the sea from the land to which the sun goes when it is always dark, from the far south, and found in Islöken another people whom they conquered and made their slaves. Of the slaves these'—with a contemptuous gesture towards the shore—'are the descendants, and of their masters I and the other chiefs of the land! But the language of the people

is still the language of the slaves, and it is only the chiefs who are taught this, the tongue of our first fathers.'

The doctor mused for a minute or two.

'Strange!' he said; 'but it is strong confirmation of my Norwegian theory, and I must investigate it further.'

Before we had reached the lake there must have been at least a hundred and fifty people on each bank, among them several fair-skinned persons to whom extraordinary respect was shown, and with whom Eyvind exchanged salutations. All of them had either two or three feathers in their caps, and wore bear-skins. The common people, both men and women, were clad in some coarse woollen stuff, made (we afterwards discovered) from the wool of the musk-ox. The women, as far as we could see, were neither beautiful nor graceful, but we were quite prepared to accept our guest's statement that the females of the 'upper classes,' of whom we saw none, were better.

The river being rather rapid on issuing from the lake, we had some difficulty in forcing our way into the latter; but when we succeeded in doing so, we found the water so calm that we were able to proceed at a much accelerated speed. Those on shore were left behind; and we, under Eyvind's guidance, headed directly for a cluster of houses that was visible on the left side of the lake, about two miles distant.

'That is Orn, at which the justice-council of Reyðverá sits,' said the chief.

In crossing the lake, we saw on shore in several places tracks of ground that, in strong contrast to the surrounding fertility, lay bare and desolate, as if they had been the scene of some terrible convulsion of nature, as we suspected had been the case. And we were right; for, according to Eyvind in his somewhat figurative language, the wicked gods imprisoned beneath the earth had made one of many unsuccessful efforts to escape, and this was one of the consequences.

'When did this happen?' Cecil inquired.

‘Four moons ago, when the darkness was at its greatest,’ was the reply.

‘It must have been the same, then, as the one we felt—or whose tail we felt—at Weymouth Harbour on Christmas night. Ask him, doctor, if it was a very severe one.’

Eyvind coolly answered that only a score or two of his countrymen had been killed, and one or two houses swallowed up; from which it may be inferred that earthquakes are of pretty frequent occurrence in Islöken. The whole country, indeed, is the scene of violent volcanic action; everywhere, in the days that followed, we noticed evidences of past and present activity; and it may be questioned if anywhere else on the face of the globe, even in Iceland, the underground forces are so strong and so destructive. No wonder they are attributed by the superstitious inhabitants to wicked gods imprisoned for their sins!

By this time we were nearing the town of Orn, which, we saw as we approached it, was situated between two streams that here fell into the lake. Several boats were lying in the larger of the two, *that* to the right, and on its right bank there were a few houses more pretentious than those on the opposite side, in the town proper, which were small and by no means handsome. There was not the least attempt at regularity, and scattered here and there on both banks were curious-looking knolls or hillocks.

We were soon observed, and, long before we were within hailing distance, the various boats—there were six of them altogether, each about the size of the larger we had in tow—had been manned and were advancing to meet us. In each were eight rowers and a chief with three feathers as commander, all fully armed.

‘These are the principal chiefs or council of Reyðverá,’ observed Eyvind, ‘and they draw near to demand of ye who ye are and whence ye come.’

At first the boats came on with much vigour and dash, but as they got nearer, and their occupants had a better oppor-

tunity of scrutinising our strange and wonderful appearance, they showed less eagerness in approaching us. Finally, five of them stopped altogether about thirty or forty yards off, rowing back as we advanced; but the sixth, the chief of which was a bold-looking man of middle age—Orná, the head-man or ruler of Reyðverá, Eyvind told us—came much nearer, though it also drew up within ten yards or so. That being done, Orná hailed Eyvind, and said something to him in the common language.

‘No doubt he’s demanding “who we are, and whence we come,”’ said Cecil.

Eyvind, standing in the bows of the launch, answered him at some length, in all likelihood detailing everything he knew of us. At first the chief looked as if a little displeased, and then we saw his expression of surprise deepen into one of the most absolute amazement; and at every sentence he and the others—who had ventured to draw nearer to hear what was being said—gave vent to sundry exclamations of wonder.

But the conference came to an abrupt end while our guest was still in the middle of his harangue. Suddenly, during the narration of some incident more than usually interesting, Clements happened to open the escape-valve (whether inadvertently or not I should not like to say), and the silence was broken by the sharp, hissing, unpleasant sound made by the escaping steam. The effect was instantaneous. The moment the sound was heard, and without waiting to discover the cause, the six boats were simultaneously turned and headed for the shore with all the strength the rowers could put into their strokes. Chiefs and men seemed alike in consternation; and I can only account for their flight by the supposition that they had been so upset by our mysterious and—to them—marvellous appearance that only such a slight thing as this was needed to cause them to lose their heads. At anyrate we did not for a moment put it down to want of courage; though, as it was, they never stopped until they had reached the inlet.

Even our friend Eyvind had been somewhat affected by the unlooked-for interruption to his speech ; and now, a little paler than usual, he was standing on guard, with his hand on his sword.

While I gave the engineer a gentle reprimand, the doctor hastened to explain to the chief that the sound was merely caused by the escape of some of the power that drove the vessel.

‘Devils?’ he inquired inquisitively, and a little anxiously ; but being assured that we had no connection with such, he seemed quite at his ease at once, and even laughed at the recollection of the fleeing boats. Evidently, if he had not sufficient understanding, he had faith.

By his advice we ran straight in instead of waiting until the people got over their fright and made another move. As we came nearer, however, we saw that the shore was lined by a great crowd that showed no signs of fear, and in front of them, we could see, were large numbers of armed men holding their spears and shields as if in readiness for us.

‘It looks as if we were to have a warm reception, after all,’ said the doctor, gravely.

Agreeing with him, I thought it as well to have our rifles ready also, in case they might be needed.





CHAPTER XVII.

CONCERNING THE PARADISE OF THE NORTH.



OUR fears, however, proved to be unfounded. As we entered the estuary of the little river we remarked that the six chiefs were standing, not amongst the crowd on the left bank, but by themselves in front of a large building on the opposite side of the water. Near them was a company of their armed followers; but now that their feet were, so to speak, on their native heath, they seemed to have quite recovered their lost courage.

'I suppose we shall land there?' I said.

'Yes,' answered Eyvind, through Lorimer. 'That is the council-house of Reyðverá before which the chiefs are standing. There, I doubt not, they will welcome ye to the land of Islöken.'

The people in the town, meanwhile, appeared to be somewhat disappointed that we had not landed on their side; and as we turned in towards the council-house, we noticed that they were making a rush towards a narrow part of the stream a little farther up, across which a rude bridge had been thrown.

A moment later we had touched the bank. Eyvind was the first to leap ashore, followed by Cecil with a rope to affix to an iron pole which stood there, presumably for that purpose. Then the rest of us, except Gates and Jansen, who were left on the launch with strict orders to allow nobody on board, also landed and advanced towards the assembled chiefs. As may be supposed, we did not forget to take our loaded

firearms with us. They, on their part, looked at us a little askance, and Eyvind was addressed by Orná in what seemed to me rather a peremptory tone. He replied, no doubt explaining the episode on the lake, and then turned to us.

'Strangers,' he said, 'the justice-council of Reyðverá demand your business in this land, and whether you come as friends or as foes?'

'Tell the council,' the doctor responded, 'that we come from a country to the far south, and have no other purpose in visiting thy land than to see its wonders and be friends with its people, whose hospitality we now claim.'

Of the effect of this politic answer we could not judge; but, at anyrate, it led to an animated conversation of several minutes' duration, in which Eyvind took a prominent part. In the end the latter requested us to accompany the chiefs into the council-house. But before we did so, we pointed out to him that the mob was now thronging dangerously near the boats, and that, if the restraining presence of the chiefs was removed, it might not be easy to prevent them boarding them. He agreed with us, spoke to Orná, and then issued a command to the soldiers, the consequence of which was that a cordon was drawn around the spot, and the people thus effectually kept off.

This done, we accompanied him towards the house, which was considerably the largest to be seen, and fairly regularly, if plainly built. It was, like all the others, of one story only. Passing through an open doorway into a passage ornamented with trophies of the chase, we reached a large room; and into this, the council-hall of the district, we were ushered by our friend Eyvind. The floor was covered with handsome furs, and the walls embellished in the same way as the lobby; and in the middle of the chamber was a rough table of fir-wood, with a dozen chairs, also pretty rough, around it. And, most home-like of all, at the head of the room was a fireplace, not unlike our own, and in it was a fire, in which was being burned coal. That fuel, it seems, is to be

found in abundance all over Islöken, in most places almost at the surface, and so it is in universal use.

We were immediately invited to sit down, which we did, and found the seats by no means soft. Then Orná commenced a catechism, which, having evidently decided at length that we were really men like himself, he strove to make as searching as possible. In this he was materially aided by his brother chiefs. The doctor answered to the best of his ability; and at the close the ruler of Reydverá was pleased to deliver himself somewhat as follows:

‘Ye say ye are strangers from a far country, whence no strangers have ever, within the memory of man, reached the land of Islöken, and that ye come to visit this land without evil in your hearts. If that be so, ye have nothing to fear from the people of Reydverá, who are ever ready to welcome others. But if ye are enemies with the faces of friends, come to spy out the land, beware! for ye shall be found out and killed as surely as the snow comes and melts again!’

He paused, and we saw a faint smile hovering round Eyvind's mouth. Doubtless he was thinking that Orná and his other countrymen had not yet had experience of our various magical secrets, and of his own superiority in that respect.

‘But now, strangers, ye are welcome to Reydverá,’ resumed Orná, ‘and ye have freedom to go where ye will and see what ye will within its bounds so long as ye deal fairly with us. And that ye have comfort until Aleif the king and the great council that sits at Hjalnord know of your coming, ye shall have the house that stands next to this for your own, and the men of Orn are your servants, to do with them what ye will.’

So far we had no reason to feel dissatisfied with our reception, and in a word or two the doctor thanked Orná and the council for it. The former acknowledged the compliment by a nod, and then he turned from us to Eyvind, to whom he spoke, not in the semi-Icelandic dialect, but in the native language. We saw Eyvind's eyebrows draw together, as

if in perplexity, but without hesitation he plunged into the narrative of some episode or other. Soon, by his gestures, we made out that he was describing the combat between himself and Thostar's party; and we could observe also that Orná's brow grew blacker and blacker as he went on. Evidently, he was not pleased with the recital. When Eyvind had finished, a lively conversation took place between the chiefs, still in the native tongue, and finally our friend said something with what was obviously a considerable amount of heat. Orná as warmly replied, and then addressed the doctor.

'It seems,' he said, sternly, 'that ye strangers have aided in killing a chief of this land and his men. It must be looked into; meanwhile the promise I have given ye holds good. As your hunger must be great, a repast has been prepared for ye in your house, and when ye are again required, the council shall send for ye.'

The doctor was about to reply, before acquiescing in this polite dismissal; but Eyvind, with a look that plainly indicated that it was his affair and that of nobody else, forestalled him.

'I have already told thee, Orná,' he cried in Norse, 'that the combat was a fair one, and that whatever blame there is falls on me alone! And I am ready to answer for it, man to man, or before the great council at Hjalnord. But as to these strangers, they are *my* guests; and Orná should know by this time that Eyvind of Hjetla can defend that which is his!'

This was apparently an allusion the head-man did not relish (it had reference, we were subsequently told, to an attempt he and some others had made on Eyvind's property, in which they had been badly routed), for he turned rather red, and answered in a sharp tone. But Eyvind merely smiled disdainfully, and thereafter, with a somewhat ironical bow to the company, asked us to proceed with him to our new residence.

Outside, the crowd was densely packed around the soldiers, but there was no rushing or rough play. The building to which we were led was smaller than the council-house, consisting only of two large rooms (one of them a kitchen) and three smaller ones containing beds and leaden baths. The large chamber was furnished much in the same way as the one in which we had been examined, save that the table was of slate instead of wood. At the back of the house, at some distance from it, were several of the curious rocky knolls I have already mentioned.

As soon as we were within the room the doctor lost no time in asking Eyvind the cause of the change in Orná's bearing.

'It is thus,' he responded. 'Thostar, whom I slew—he was the last of his race—was married to the sister of Orná, and they were great friends. Orná has ever hated me. So when I told him that I had vanquished him and those with him, and with little wisdom mentioned the part which Godfrei and Cecil'—pronouncing our names almost perfectly—'took in it, he waxed wroth, and fain would kill us all. Besides, by this I become a more powerful man than he; for to my own slaves are now added those of Thostar and his family.* His heart, therefore, is full of evil against us all, and it behoves us to keep a watch upon him, for if he can do me or ye a hurt he will hesitate not to do it.'

The doctor gave us an expressive glance after translating this.

'Is the danger great?' he asked our host.

'Perhaps; but I think not,' replied Eyvind. 'Openly he dare not attack me, and now that ye are under my protection he will think twice before attacking ye.'

After his previous information this was consolatory in a negative sort of way, and he had a few more grains of comfort in store for us.

* A curious custom, by which, in Islöken, the victors in a feud, if the defeated party is annihilated, become possessors of their enemies' territory and property.

‘But,’ he continued, ‘he may do harm under the pretence of friendship, and so’—with a significant look at our rifles—‘it may be well to have thy magic ready. And to make sure, I will send at once a trusty messenger to my own valley for a body of men, and when they come, in four or five days’ time, ye can either remain in this place under their care, or go with me to Hjetla—as ye will.’

And after another warning to be on our guard, he went off to carry out his purpose, while we sat down to a substantial meal that was brought in from the kitchen. Of the delicacies peculiar to Islöken it would be more difficult to say what we had than what we had not, so many and varied were the dishes; but the principal appeared to be venison, beef, several varieties of fowl, fish, eggs, hot rye-cakes, and a strange compound of the curds of milk, covered with cream, and divers other substances of which we were ignorant. It was not unpleasant in taste, and seems to be the national dish of the people; and the moment the doctor heard its name—*skyr*—he identified it with a favourite of the ancient Norsemen, and frequently mentioned in the Sagas. For drink we had water, milk, and ale *ad libitum*, and very good indeed the latter two were.

‘Well, what do you think of our position now?’ asked I, when we had done full justice to Orná’s hospitality, and Wemyss and Clements had relieved Gates and Jansen on the launch.

‘Think of it!’ repeated the doctor, and then went on enthusiastically, ‘Why, Oliphant, I have never felt so happy as I do now! We have reached the Farthest North; we have discovered this land, with its wonderful configuration and phenomena and its mysterious people; we are, I hope, on the road to further discoveries: what more is wanted?’

‘You’re right so far, doctor,’ said Cecil, a little quizzingly, ‘but what about our friend Orná and his ways? It seems to me that if we’re sent to join the late Thostar, our successes are and will be of very little use to us.’

'And that's true enough also,' replied the doctor, 'though we'll wait until the massacre comes off before giving up hope. Perhaps, you know, *we* shall have a word to say on the subject too.'

But the next few days passed away quite peacefully, and in spite of our watchfulness we saw no reason for doubting our perfect safety. Orná, it is true, kept out of sight, but this did not prevent us taking advantage of his permission to do what and go where we liked. Under Eyvind's guidance we made ourselves thoroughly acquainted with the natural features of the district and with the social life of the people, and investigated almost everything, I believe, into which inquiry was possible.

Their political system may be explained in a few words. The whole land is divided into some sixty districts governed by chiefs who really wield independent power. They are nominally subject to King Aleif and the National Assembly or Council of Hjalnord, composed of representatives from each district; but that body exists merely for settling disputes between chiefs at the last extremity, and its authority is never otherwise exercised. In each district is a justice-council of the minor chiefs. The common people without exception hold their farms in vassalage from the chiefs, and are slaves in name; but slavery as we understand it has practically no existence in Islöken. Between the masses and the rulers is a middle class composed of descendants of former chiefs, and, in fact, all of the race of the original conquerors, who fill the offices above the capacity of the commonalty and below the notice of the rulers. These gentlemen are distinguished by two feathers in their caps; the badge of the chiefs, as you know, is three.

The religion, if it may so be called, is a question too complicated to be entered into here. There is no regular profession of priesthood, but at certain periods festivals are held, at which the gods are worshipped with much religious zeal and bacchanalian fervour. The fact that the dominant

race is of Norse descent is proved, if there can be any doubt about the matter, by the mere names of the divinities; and, indeed, the whole mythology, with hardly a change, is that of the Scandinavians of old. Odin, and Thor, and Loki—to mention only the principal—admit of no doubt. The theory of the creation is also identically similar to that given in the Prose Edda—how Odin slew a terrible monster, and out of his body was made the earth, of his blood the ocean and waters, of his bones the mountains, and of his skull the sky. The fire-demon, Loki, is their Satan, and they have it that he and his followers are imprisoned below the earth; hence the earthquakes and eruptions so common in their land, caused by his herculean efforts to escape.

Stories like these, in the forms of ballads and tales, are the common property of the people. Writing of any kind is absolutely unknown, and from this the doctor formed the supposition that the original Norsemen had left their native country before the invention of runes, though, of course, these might have existed and none of this particular party been familiar with them. Any other than physical education was not popular in those times. But this surmise was a little upset by Eyvind. According to him, there was a legend that in days long gone past a body of learned men had flourished in the land who had testimony of their ancestors' arrival and of the country from which they came, but that in some disastrous convulsion they had all perished and their learning been lost for ever!

'And so,' said the doctor, regretfully, 'we can know nothing of these wonderful adventurers save that they were vikings, and that, more than a thousand years ago, they penetrated through the ice and discovered this continent. And what of those *they* found here, and whom they conquered? It is all a profound and insoluble mystery!'

The social conditions of Islöken are in many respects analogous to those of Europe. Monogamy is practised, and as a consequence the women, as in more civilised countries,

generally 'roule the rst.' The houses are usually of ~~12~~ or three rooms, and in their way comfortable; and, ~~sur~~ rounded by their fields of rye and pasture, and ~~sometimes by~~ their groups of dwarf birches, present a fairly ~~home-like~~ appearance. Rye and barley, the only cereals raised, ~~are~~ sown in April and ready by August; and the latter is used solely for the purposes of brewing—the quantity of ~~ale con-~~sumed by all classes being considerable.

I have spoken of dwarf birches, and these may be said to be the only trees in the country. Only in one part do firs flourish (but, as we never visited it, no reason can be given for this, nor an explanation of how they survive the winter), and so scarce are they that the boats made from them do not number altogether more than twenty, and belong exclusively to chiefs. For most of the purposes for which wood is used at home, metal has, if possible, to be utilised. The dwarf birches, though numerous, are never more than three inches in thickness, and the tallest I ever saw was fourteen feet, the average being about ten.

The minerals worked are coal, iron, tin, copper, and lead, all of which are found in great abundance. Iron-refining is well understood and carried on everywhere, being, in fact, the only industry save that of agriculture in the country.

In Reyðverá alone there are immense flocks of tame musk-oxen and reindeer. Curiously enough, we found several varieties of the former hitherto unknown, some of them like sheep, and others resembling cattle, but all obviously of the same species. Both are used for draught purposes, the oxen on the farm and the reindeer for longer distances; as also, during the winter, are dogs of a breed resembling the Esquimaux. With regard to the dogs, Eyvind told us a curious story. Until within a generation or so, he said, there had been no such animals in Islöken. Suddenly, one autumn, eight of them appeared from somewhere unknown, and turned up at the door of a respectable peasant, who at first thought they were wolves, but then, seeing that they

were tame, took them in and put them to use. They had multiplied fast, and now there was hardly a family in the district without one or more of them.

'Why,' said Cecil, when he heard this, 'they must be the animals that bolted from Collins on the other side of Mount Stafford thirty years ago! Ask him, doctor, how long it is since their first appearance.'

Dr Lorimer did so.

'From his calculation,' he answered, after receiving Eyvind's reply, 'there can be no doubt of it. Only another instance of the wonderful!'

Our own dogs, I may add, did not agree well with the native animals for some time, and many were the fights that König and Anteny had until their canine adversaries became reconciled to their invasion.

The country literally swarmed with game. It seemed to be, and probably was, the breeding-place of every kind of bird native to the Arctic regions; and Dr Lorimer had not the least doubt that he had solved that vexed question for ever. Deer, foxes, hares, ermine, and lemmings were plentiful, and the mountains were infested by bears and wolves. In the rivers and streams, too, there were salmon, trout, and other fish in abundance, more so, we were told, than in any other district; and in this fact the doctor had a clue to the etymology of the name 'Reydverá,' which he made out to mean 'trout (or salmon) refuge.'

And now to the remarkable natural features of the country. I have mentioned the great number of geysers everywhere to be seen, there being, in fact, one to every field or two; but I do not think I have touched upon a very peculiar feature in connection with these. From the springs there was not, as one would expect, any great overflow; but where they were near streams, we noticed that there was a continual oozing of water into the latter. From this the doctor drew the deduction that the water, flowing underground and keeping the surface moist, was one cause of the fertility of the land. I

could give a score of startling observations we made, but as this is more purely a narrative of our personal experience, and as Dr Lorimer is about to produce an elaborate scientific work in which all such matters will be thoroughly discussed, I do not feel at liberty to enter into detailed and perhaps tedious particulars. In a word, however, I may say that within three miles of Orn (itself a town of about five thousand inhabitants, and with no features worthy of special mention) there are at least two lakes of a considerable size, in which the water is *always boiling*—a phenomenon peculiar to Islöken, I suppose, but certainly common enough there.

The climate of the Paradise of the North was worthy of the name all the time we were in it—ever mild, and occasionally even *hot*. But the winters, we gathered, were little less severe than anywhere around, though some of the rivers, on account of their high temperature, were never frozen over. The long months were spent in hospitality and festivity, varied by bear-hunts when the moon was sufficiently bright. With the return of the spring the ice and snow soon melted, furs and wraps were thrown aside, and the natives worked hard, as long as the sun was with them, to prepare for the succeeding winter.



Musk Ox.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM.

BUT our period of quietude soon came to an end. At first, as we went among the people, we found them respectful and kindly, if rather curious; but on the third day we noticed that an entire change had taken place, and that, in contrast to their former hospitality, they now avoided us as much as possible. While we were speculating on the cause of the difference, Eyvind arrived with the advice to keep within doors for a day or two.

‘Why?’ asked the doctor, with some curiosity. ‘What has happened, Eyvind?’

‘I know not as yet,’ replied the chief. ‘I only know that Orná has been putting the slaves’—slaves, be it understood, was used by Eyvind in the sense that we use ‘peasantry’—‘against ye, and that it may be well to have your eyes wide open when the time comes. And,’ he continued, ‘be sure that ye forget not to have the wonderful magic ready.’

We promised him that we should not; and, as the advice was good, at once brought up our guns and a large amount of ammunition from the launch, that we might be prepared for any contingency.

In connection with the launch, a somewhat ludicrous incident occurred that evening. So far, owing to a proclamation by Orná that any one molesting us would be severely punished, no attempt had been made to approach nearer to it than the bank. Now, however, the decree

seemed to be reversed. That night, as it was becoming dark, and while Gates was on board alone, engaged below in cleaning, he saw through a small porthole in the side of the launch two boats coming cautiously down the river towards our vessel. There could be no doubt of the purpose in view, for they were full of armed men, and their caution spoke for itself; and the stoker immediately realised that a surprise was to be attempted. His first impulse was to fire his rifle to warn us; but remembering the way in which the natives had fled under the alarm caused by Clements' joke, he thought that the affair might be disposed of without the least fuss. Being a man of ready resource, he instantly invented a plan. The boiler was nearly full of water, not exactly boiling, but hot enough to frighten people receiving some of it upon them; and, with the help of the hose, Gates was ready for the enemy. But, in case of need, he did not forget to have his loaded firearms by his side.

On the boats came until they were within twenty yards of the launch. Seeing nobody on deck (for Gates, of course, kept well out of sight), the men of Reydiverá evidently thought they would have an easy task. But they were mistaken; and the stoker, when they were near enough, turned on the water, and simultaneously a well-directed stream issued from the porthole, falling full and fairly upon the occupants of the first boat. There was a horrid yell, followed by another as the second boat was served in the same way; and, seized by panic as they saw the water proceeding from the side of the launch apparently of its own volition, the enemy turned and made for the opposite shore as fast as they could row.

Startled by the cry, we came out only in time to see the fleeing boats. We could not understand it until Gates, with many bursts of laughter, had explained; and then we joined heartily in the merriment, the doctor remarking that after that nobody could say that a Scot had no sense of humour. But the episode had also a serious side, as showing the

development of Orná's hostility; and so, in addition to supplementing the watch by Clements and Jansen, we thought it as well to keep the vessel's lamps lit all night.

Shortly afterwards we had a visit from Eyvind, who was in a state of great excitement.

'The town is full of the magic!' he exclaimed. 'Two boats with a score of men, they say, were drawing nigh to the iron magic boat to see it, when it became jealous, and of itself threw out a jet of hot water that scalded them. It is wonderful! No one dares to go near it again, not even at the command of the chief!'

We told him how it had happened, and he was vastly amused when at length he comprehended. But, as he said, the deception must be kept up, for as long as the people thought the vessel enchanted they would steer wide of it.

We were not disturbed until the afternoon of the next day, and then we were summoned to appear before Orná in the council-house. The doctor, Cecil, and I went, accompanied by Eyvind, leaving Wemyss and Jansen to watch the house, and the other two on the launch. We observed large numbers of people standing here and there, doing nothing, and were half-inclined to expect treachery; but as each of us had a rifle and a couple of revolvers, and knew the natives' nervousness, we felt not in the least alarmed.

In the council-chamber the whole of the council was assembled, with Orná at their head. As soon as we were seated that chief addressed us.

'Is it well,' he began, 'that ye strangers should receive the people of this country, who have treated ye kindly and acted hospitably towards ye, as ye did last night? I said that as long as ye were true to us, no harm should befall ye, but now it is plain it is otherwise. Ye have aided in killing a chief of the land; ye have shown yourselves our enemies; and now I ask ye, that ye may have fairness at our hands, if ye submit to the justice-council of Reyðverá, that ye may be tried for that with which ye are charged?'

Before the doctor had time to translate this, Eyvind leaped to his feet and angrily replied.

'No, Orná,' he cried, 'they shall *not* submit themselves to the justice-council of Reyðverá, that thou mayst do as thou likest with them! They are my guests, and the guests of Eyvind are as a part of himself. And as for thy charge, canst thou tell the purpose of those for whom thou complainest, and for whom *they* acted?' Orná changed colour, and Eyvind went on: 'Thou knowest; and yet thou bringest such a charge against the strangers, for thine own purposes! Do thy worst, Orná, and remember the fate of thy kinsman Thostar and his family!'

The other chiefs looked apprehensive, but whether on account of Eyvind's words or in fear of Orná's passion we did not know. The latter, on his part, took no notice of his opponent, but merely said to the doctor, rather too quietly for comfort: 'Is that the will of the strangers?'

We consulted together, and decided that we had no alternative. 'It is,' answered the doctor.

'Then ye must bear the consequences,' retorted the chief, menacingly; and, with a wave of his hand, he intimated that the interview was at an end.

'It seems to me that it's becoming serious,' said I, as soon as we were again in our own quarters. 'Ask Eyvind, doctor, what he thinks of it.'

'Orná has some plan in his head of which we know nothing,' replied our friend. 'Not against me, perhaps; I do not think he will try that. But if he can strike me through you, so as to be in the right, he will not hesitate; for there is no love between us. But if he only lingers long enough to allow my men to arrive, we may then bid defiance to him, and, if need be, burn Orná to the ground before he can sound the alarm-bell.'

'Rather bloodthirsty, I'm afraid,' was Cecil's comment. 'But when are those warriors due?'

'Hjetla is two days' journey by water,' said Eyvind, 'and

a little more by land, but as I ordered them to make all haste, we may expect them to-night.'

'*By water!*' I repeated, as an idea struck me. 'Ask him, please, if we can go in the launch to this place of his.'

He considered a moment, and then said that it was quite possible.

'Then why can't we go off just now,' I resumed, 'without asking Orná's permission or troubling him further, and thus save all the unnecessary slaying and so forth that seems inevitable?'

To the others, as to me, this seemed a sensible way out of the difficulty, but the chief at once vetoed it.

'It cannot be!' he exclaimed, decisively. 'If we go, and my men, whom I have told to march straight here without entering the town, arrive like oxen without a leader, Orná may kill or capture them all as invaders of his district. Under me, they are equal to all Reyðverá. We must stay; and surely, with the aid of the magic tubes, we shall keep Orná and his men at bay until mine come!'

The matter being put in this light, of course we could not refuse; and, after all, I don't think we had much fear of the result. Our only doubt had been for the launch, but now, according to Eyvind, it was, owing to the natives' fears, as safe as if it were a hundred miles distant.

'And I have a plan of more use than our magic tubes!' suddenly exclaimed the doctor. 'If the beggars *do* turn up, I'll frighten them out of their wits, so that they'll never come near us again!'

So, while Eyvind went into the town to do a little reconnoitring and news-collecting, Lorimer took temporary command and set us all to work. From the launch were transferred the electric battery and several dynamite cartridges with detonators; and then, under his direction, we drilled holes in three of the peculiar-shaped mounds of rock behind the house, of which I have already spoken. In these the doctor placed the cartridges with the wires affixed, and then



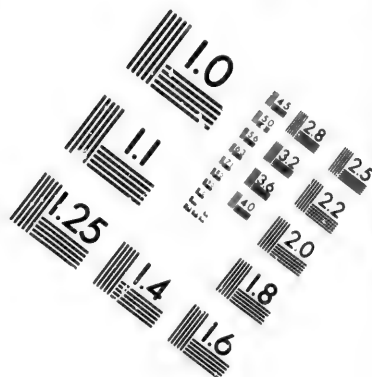
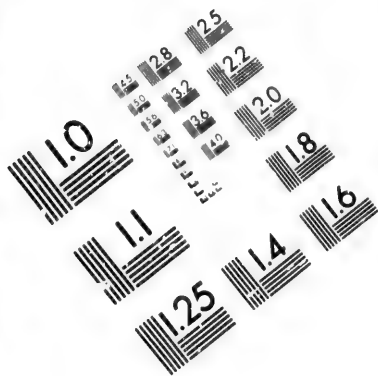
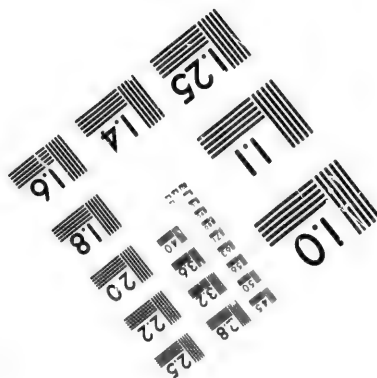
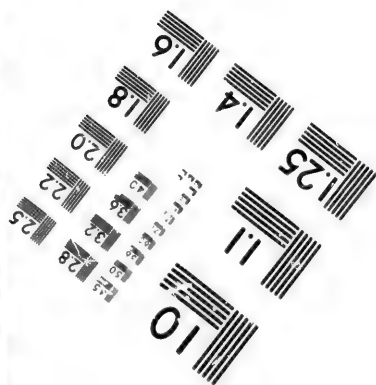
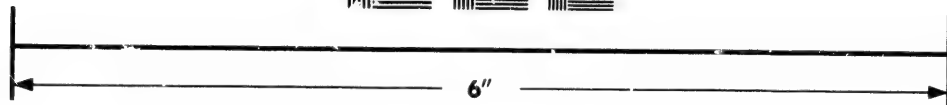
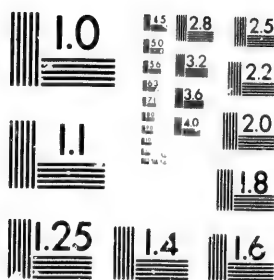


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plugged up the holes; and when the wires had been connected with the battery inside the house, we felt ready for the combat.

About five o'clock Wemyss, who was on watch, reported that there was a large crowd of people in front of the council-house, whom Orná seemed to be addressing. They were armed, and by their shouts in a somewhat belligerent mood. A little thereafter, Eyvind turned up with three or four natives belonging to his valley, who had volunteered to stand by him, and also with several swords and spears for us. He reported that the head-man had tried to inflame the commoners against us by various charges, and was now assembling his serfs for a general attack.

'But they care not for the work,' he said; 'and if it were not that Orná is too great to be resisted, they would only laugh in their hearts at his words, and say ye did right.'

When, in the course of half an hour, the mob was seen to be in motion, our iron gate was closed and barricaded with all speed, and we took our places at the windows, weapons in hand. In a few minutes there was a dense throng of armed men in front of the building, prominent among them being Orná and the other members of the justice-council. The moment Eyvind caught sight of the chief, he hailed him from his window, and demanded the reason of the attack.

'I know not by what right thou askest,' Orná answered, with assumed dignity; 'but I say that by the order of the council of Reyðverá, to whose judgment they have refused to submit, the strangers thou befriendest must be given up.'

'The order of the council!' retorted Eyvind, scornfully. 'Thou knowest—and if thou dost not, I call thy men to witness—that the council is thee, and thee only! As to the strangers, thou hast my answer and theirs already. And now, Orná, I say this to thee face to face, and again call thy people to witness, that I challenge thee to fight me singly, that by thy death or mine this dispute may be settled!'

He paused an instant, and there was no reply from the

other. We did not wonder at it, for neither in size nor strength was Orná his match, and probably that gentleman knew it. 'Thou refusest,' he went on: 'so be it! But take my opinion of thee as a coward, and take also the strangers into thy charge—if thou art able!'

'I will, and thee too!' shouted Orná fiercely, almost maddened, I suppose, by Eyvind's taunts; and forthwith he ordered his men forward.

But the doctor, stepping into our friend's place, asked his attention for a moment, and with looks of curiosity the thronging mass again came to a stand-still.

'Beware of what ye are about to do!' commenced Lorimer in his most impressive Icelandic. 'Ye know not who we are or the powers we possess; beware lest we bring upon ye and your families some great evil! Think ye,' he continued, as he warmed to his work, while we within, guessing his meaning, almost laughed aloud—'think ye that it is not within our power to smite ye where ye stand? Begone while it is yet time, or ye may repent when it is too late!'

Orná smiled incredulously, and, without condescending to reply, turned to his men.

'Then but advance one step, Orná,' concluded Lorimer, 'and thou shalt have such a sign of our power as thou shalt never forget!'

Still sceptical, the chief renewed his command to advance, and as his warriors began to press forward, the doctor briskly stepped within the room, saw that the electrical apparatus was in order, and with a smile sharply turned the handle thrice. Next instant there was a loud report, followed within a second by two more; then the air was filled with rising and falling rocks, smoke, and flame; and with a simultaneous howl of terror, chiefs and men alike took to their heels, and never stopped until they had placed the water between them and our uncanny vicinity.

'A brilliant success!' ejaculated the doctor, gleefully. 'I knew it would be, and it has been!'

'It is, indeed!' said Cecil, grimly, as a descending mass of rock crashed through the roof of our house, and carried away part of the ceiling. Nor did the neighbouring buildings, and especially the council-house, escape the effect of the explosions.

In the meantime, our attention was recalled to ourselves by several groans from the inside of the room; and, looking, we made out that Eyvind's native followers had cast themselves on the floor, and were there writhing as if in severe pain. The chief himself, more used to our ways, was on his feet, but he stared at us in a manner that signified that he wasn't altogether sure of us.

'What is it ye have done?' he inquired of the doctor, who hastened to let him know that there had been nothing supernatural in the display he had witnessed.

'It may be so,' he replied, doubtfully, 'but though ye have caused Orná and his men to flee, I cannot say that ye have made matters better. For,' he continued, 'ye have sacrificed to the fire-god the sacred mounds of Odin, round which the yearly festivals take place.'

This was said in a tone of such intense horror that the doctor, somewhat impressed, asked particulars of the ceremony. It seems that the great festival of the year is celebrated at the conclusion of the harvest, and that then these peculiar knolls are used by the appointed priests as platforms or pulpits. They are therefore held in the most sacred veneration, and Eyvind was almost beside himself at the mere idea of our involuntary desecration, and of its possible consequences.

'But of course ye knew not,' he went on, after a pause; 'and now we are safe for a time, for the cowards are too much frightened to attack us again—until, it may be, Orná can rouse their anger against ye for the destruction of the mounds. And before that'—more cheerfully—'my men may arrive, and then we need not fear them.'

The natives having been reassured, and some food taken, Eyvind ventured out to reconnoitre around the house. The

launch and those in it, he reported on his return, were all right; there were no signs of the enemy on our side of the water; and the council-house was in a state of nearly complete ruin. Only another addition, as the doctor said, to Orná's score against us.

'And with this incident of the sacred mounds,' commented Cecil, 'added to his original feelings, it must be pretty considerable as it is.'

For an hour or two there was no movement. Then, about ten o'clock, as the darkness was deepening, a most unearthly howling was heard from the opposite bank of the river, and at the same time we could see many lights moving hither and thither in a most mysterious manner.

'What's up now, I wonder?' asked the doctor.

Eyvind did not know, and was apparently much perplexed. But in a minute or two, after thinking the matter over, he was ready with a proposal.

'I cannot venture into the town myself,' he said, 'but we may send one of the men, who are unknown to be with us, and he can easily and safely find out what Orná is doing.'

He indicated the natives with us, who now, barring an occasional furtive glance at the doctor, appeared quite at their ease; and we looked at them a little doubtfully. Lorimer, indeed, could not help asking the chief if his messenger was sure to return. With something approaching indignation, he emphatically replied in the affirmative; and, choosing the youngest of the group, he gave him his instructions in the native tongue and sent him off.

For nearly an hour we waited in suspense, the distant tumult, meanwhile, continuing unabated. Then the scout returned with the news that the whole population was assembled near the bridge, and that Orná was enlarging on the enormity of our offences and the punishment they merited. Worse than that, he was supplying all comers with as much ale as they cared to drink, and already, according to our informer, most of them were in various stages of intoxication.

‘Just as I feared,’ said Eyvind seriously. ‘Orn  is as the fox, and knowing that while sober his men would altogether refuse to attack ye, he has filled them with ale, that under its influence they may do so. And for us it will be worse by far than if they had been sober.’

‘And what about the launch?’ suggested Cecil. ‘If they attack us while drunk, they aren’t likely to spare the boats.’

This was true enough, and various proposals were made; but in the end we resolved that our best plan was to order Clements to get up steam and keep at a good distance from the shore. At the same time he was to be prepared to take us on board if we became hard pressed. I think that, more than anything else, it was the sight of the launch as it cruised about, looking like a live thing moving on the dark water, that prevented interference with it.

I went down myself to give the engineer the order, and while I was speaking to him I fancied that the noise sounded as if nearer. Presently, looking intently, we made out a line of lights crossing the bridge and advancing on our own shore.

This was enough for me. With all speed I bounded up the slope to the house, while Clements and Gates proceeded to carry out the orders I had given.

As the rabble approached nearer and nearer, the drunken shouts grew louder, and in a few minutes we heard the rattle of a volley of throwing-spears against the iron door, followed by a number of blows, as from some heavy instrument.

Cautiously peeping from the windows,* we saw that the whole space in front of the building was covered by an unruly crowd; and as the light of the torches carried by some of them fell upon their flushed countenances, we realised that there was little hope for any of us if we fell into their hands.

* Glass manufacture being an unknown art in Isl ken, it should be mentioned that the windows are merely open spaces, with shutters of curiously formed trellis-work. On stormy days these are closed; at other times the air is allowed free access into the room.



CHAPTER XIX.

FROM REYDVERA TO HJETLA.

AFTER an interval of a minute there was another discharge of javelins, several of which crashed through the trellis-work, fortunately without doing any damage; and at the same time the attacks upon the door were renewed with great energy. The fastenings began to give way. 'Ready, now!' I cried, as this became apparent. 'Keep in shelter, and fire low.'

As I spoke, the shutters on each window were cautiously opened. The doctor and I were at one, Cecil and Wemyss at the other—Jansen being at the back, where as yet the enemy had not appeared. We glanced quickly at the crowd, saw that our rifles were ready, and then I gave the word. Crack! crack! and simultaneously with the report there was a yell from our assailants, and an instant cessation of the assault upon the door. Again and again, as quickly as the spent cartridge-shells were jerked out and others brought into their places, we fired amongst the amazed multitude, until at length, when we thought they had had enough, the shutters were closed, and we awaited the result of our experiment.

For a little there was silence, and we half hoped that our volleys had rendered us the same service as the afternoon's explosion. But, whether it was that the Dutch courage of the men of Reydverá was impervious to fear, or that they had managed to conquer it, certain it is that they were soon again battering at the door with their old vigour. Shoot as we might, we seemed to make no further impression. And

by Eyvind's attitude, and the manner in which he held his sword, it was evident that he was in expectation of a hand-to-hand fight.

'Look out, there!' suddenly shouted the doctor, who commanded the best view.

Before the words were well out of his mouth, the door fell inwards with a crash, and through the opening we saw the now infuriated crowd, eager to be at our throats, and yet hesitating to come to close quarters. Perhaps they did not altogether care to face Eyvind and his followers; who, half-sheltered by a partition of stone which had been erected earlier in the day, held this point. There was a momentary inactivity; then a quick rush and a clash of steel; but what the result was we could only guess, for the windows were likewise assailed by the adventurous natives. With a few shots we beat them off, however; and when we had time to look it was seen that the enemy had withdrawn farther back, and that before Eyvind, above the fallen door, lay several bodies.

'It is well!' said the chief, pointing grimly to his and his companions' victims.

As if in answer, the men of Reyðvera sent a flight of javelins through the open doorway, and we dropped down behind the partition only in time. But this, apparently, was their last spasmodic effort. They made no further attack, and though they still shouted and flourished their spears and torches somewhat demonstratively, one could see that their taste for the work was gone.

It was during this lull in the storm that we were startled by an unexpected 'Hist!' from Eyvind, who was listening intently, as if to some distant sound. I followed his example, and for a moment could distinguish nothing above the din made by our assailants; but then I thought I made out the steady tramp, tramp, of a large body of men coming nearer and nearer.

'It is my men: we are saved!' excitedly whispered the

chief at last. 'We must reach them, Loràmar'—his name for the doctor—'we must reach them in some manner or other before the men of Orn hear them.'

But, as was evident from the quietness that all at once fell upon the enemy, they also had heard the sound. If anything was to be done, it must be done without loss of time. Eyvind soon made up his mind. After issuing a rapid order to his native followers (doubtless to hold the house against all comers), he motioned to us to follow him, and quietly opened one of the back windows. A cautious look round revealing nothing suspicious, he jumped out. Cecil did likewise, and I followed. But in doing so I miscalculated the distance, and fell rather heavily to the ground; and before I could gather myself together I saw the gleam of torches, and heard the hoarse cries of many people all around me.

Then 'Godfrey! Doctor! Hurry up this way!' came to my ears in my brother's voice; and I rushed forward towards a confused mass struggling at some little distance. Almost before I was aware of it, I was in the midst of a general *mêlée*, thrusting hither and thither at mere random, but refraining from using my revolver in case the bullets might reach wrong destinations. What followed I scarcely know. I remember something of a sharp tussle between me and some one unknown; and then, by the light of a torch suddenly flashed upon the scene, I saw Eyvind and Cecil fighting against big odds. A moment thereafter I reached the side of the former just as a soldier was about to stab him; and when I had disposed of *that* man, my brother and I used our revolvers to such good purpose that we soon cleared off the most energetic of the enemy. Guided by the flashes, the doctor, Wemyss, and Jansen pluckily cut their way through until they had joined us; and after that we could do our best, standing back to back, without fear of wounding a friend.

But in spite of our good fortune in escaping unhurt, our situation was decidedly critical, surrounded as we were by

enemies, and liable at any moment to be killed by a chance thrust. This view seemed to strike Eyvind.

'Move towards the sound,' he said to the doctor, referring to the tramping we had heard within, and which now appeared to be quite close.

It was easier said than done. As if to frustrate the plan, there was just then a rush from that very direction. We were even borne back a yard or two. Those around, also, began to press upon us with more determination, and with the utmost exertions we could make we barely held our own. Had it not been for the intense darkness, which was more against our opponents than against our compact little corps, we should never have borne up so long. As it was, thrust after thrust, and blow after blow, we delivered in every direction; more by chance than by good guidance we managed to parry the dangerously long spears of our foes; but still they swarmed around us without showing the least sign of breaking up or going off.

While affairs were in this critical state, and we were beginning to think we had had enough of it, Eyvind abruptly shouted something in a loud voice. It was distinctly heard above the general din. Immediately there was a continued rush against us from all sides; and, while we were doing our best to repel it, we were conscious, more through the shouts and counter-shouts that rose on every side than through actual experience, that a new factor had entered into the situation. Then our assailants began to break and run in the most inexplicable fashion; we ourselves were caught up in the panic, as it were, and swept forward; and in a word, in the darkness and confusion, we lost our heads altogether. This went on for a few minutes, and at the end of the time Cecil, Jansen, and I found ourselves together close to the house, breathless and exhausted, but unhurt. Where our friends were, we knew not; but in the distance we could still hear the occasional clang of steel, telling us that the battle was not completely over.

'Did you see any of the others go down?' I inquired, anticipating the worst.

But before I could get an answer we heard from our immediate vicinity shouts for us; and, going forward, we were in a second or two amongst our companions again. And around them, we could just make out, was a large body of armed men, to whom our delivery was obviously due.

'These are the men of Hjetla,' said Eyvind, with a little pardonable pride, 'and to them we owe, at this moment, our safety, and perhaps our lives.'

After the doctor had acknowledged the debt, the first thing we did was to march round to the front of the house, putting to flight on our way a small party of the enemy. From the movement of the torches, we could see that the men of Orn were reassembling in large numbers at a safe distance, doubtless to defend the town if we should decide to avenge ourselves by attacking it. Eyvind's men, as they stood before the house in the faint light issuing from it, looked decidedly well. In all, they numbered about a hundred and fifty, and seemed as well armed and much better disciplined than Orna's, who had, in fact, no discipline at all.

Within the house we were duly presented to our friend's brother, the commander of the men—a youth who had a strong family resemblance to Eyvind. He spoke the old Norse language well; and, according to him, he had realised at once, on hearing the noise of the fighting, that his brother was in danger. But, owing to the darkness, he was afraid of making a mistake, and until he heard Eyvind's shout (which that chief had made in the hope that it might reach his men) he had been in rather a dilemma. After that, however, he and his followers had simply dashed forward and swept the others before them.

'And now,' said Dr Lorimer, when he had concluded, 'what are we to do?'

'I have a word to speak,' replied Eyvind. 'There is now

no use in staying in this place, and it seems to me best that ye all go upon the iron magic boat, taking with ye my brother Hreidmar, who shall guide you to an appointed spot. Thither I shall conduct my men by land, chastising Orná if he dares to stop me. And after that we may continue our journey in peace to the vale of Hjetla.'

To this sensible proposal there was, of course, no objection; and while Eyvind gave his brother his instructions (no doubt letting him know what to expect, and warning him not to be frightened at the wonders he would see), the signal agreed upon between Clements and me was given, and the launch put in. The engineer, it appears, had been in the greatest suspense as long as the fighting lasted, and had even made up his mind for the worst. Asked what he would have done if we had been exterminated, he promptly answered that he would have made a rush for the lake, and was certain that he could have got down the river and inlet, and so to the open sea without much difficulty.

Everything belonging to us having been transported to the boats, we said *au revoir* to Eyvind, and with Hreidmar got on board. As we steamed out of the little inlet, towing the three boats, we added the finishing touch to the probable amazement and bewilderment of the natives by letting off some rockets and other fireworks.

'My brother says that ye are not gods, but only men from a far country,' said Hreidmar, when he had witnessed with surprise our pyrotechnic display, 'but it seems to me that ye must be. During the fight I saw the flashes by which 'tis said ye kill, and now this: if ye are not gods of fire, then what is the power ye possess?'

Evidently a gentleman of an inquiring mind, I thought. The doctor explained to him as well as he could, and really he seemed to understand the substance of much he was told.

Under his directions we steamed cautiously on until daylight returned, and then we saw that we were approaching the mountainous country which I have mentioned as being

situated at the head of the lake. But before we were really within it, we put into a small bay into which a stream ran, on which stood a hamlet of three or four houses.

'Here,' said Hreidmar, 'we shall be joined in time by Eyvind and our men.'

And, sure enough, they appeared in the course of the forenoon, very tired and worn out by their long march. Fortunately for himself, Orná had thought it best not to molest them further.

In the afternoon we started again, the launch going slowly to keep time with those on shore. All day we wound through mountain scenery of the most magnificent description, the snow-covered peaks contrasting strangely with the fertile valleys at their feet, and with the dark water over which they cast their shadows.

The journey of the day following was up a long and tortuous fjord to which, by all appearances, there was no outlet; but on arriving at the head of it we remarked that it was only separated by a neck of rock a few hundred yards broad from another inlet or lake. And through this isthmus, to our great surprise, we observed that a narrow channel had been cut, connecting the two.

'Was this done by man's hand, Eyvind?' asked the doctor, after carefully inspecting it on both sides.

'It was,' answered the chief; 'and 'tis said that though two tribes, by order of the king, were employed at it, it took three generations to cut through the rock. That was ages ago, and at first only very small boats could pass through. But since then it has been widened, though even yet I doubt if there be room for the "magic boat" to pass.'

But, luckily, we had no insurmountable difficulty. The three boats were first rowed through, and the launch followed; and, although at one place there was hardly an inch to spare, and Gates declared that she touched the bottom, she finally reached the other inlet in safety, amid the gleeful shouts of

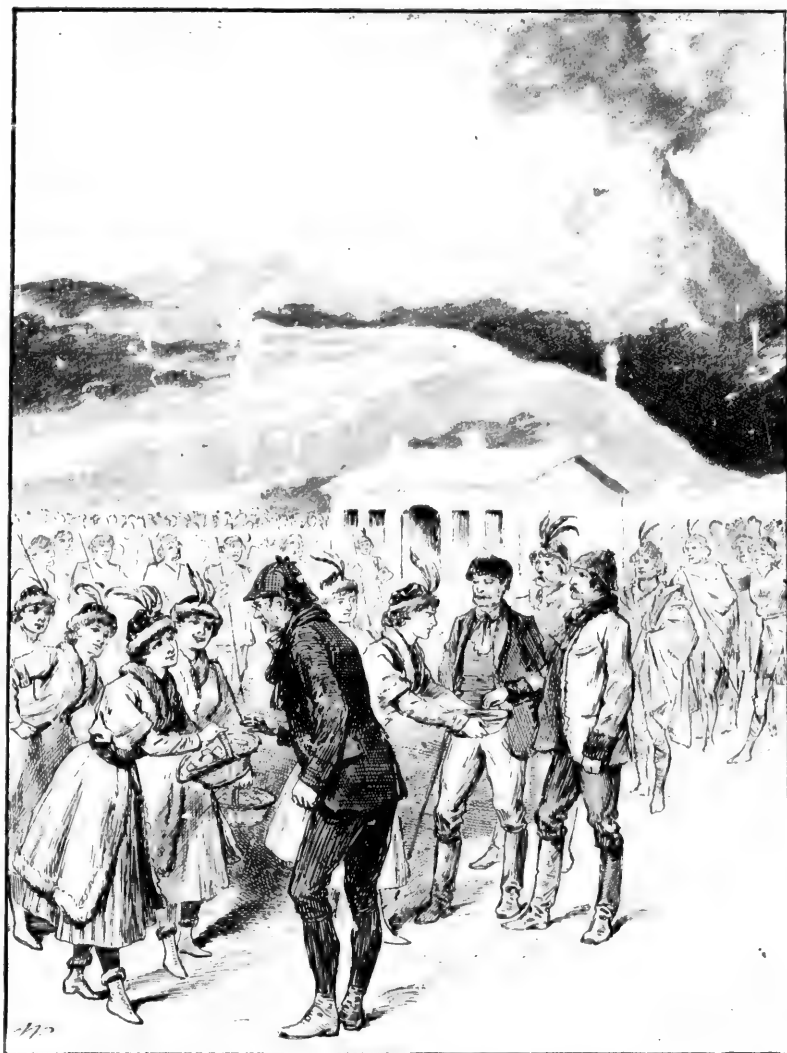
Eyvind's men, who appeared to take quite a family interest in the boat.

We were now in our friend's territory. Everywhere as we continued on our way we were received with marks of consideration and hospitality. From the curiosity, in distinction to the amazement of the people, we deduced that the news of our coming had preceded us. The country itself resembled Reyðverá in some degree, save that the scenery was grander and the soil hardly so fruitful.

It was late that evening before we reached our destination and blew off steam in front of the house of Eyvind, the *hofudr* (chief) of Hjetla. The place was situated in the midst of a broad valley entirely surrounded by mountains, and had the same characteristics as the rest of the country—the innumerable geysers, the curious phenomenon of the oozing water, and the fields of pasture, rye, and barley. The 'justice-town' of Eyvind's territory was at the extreme end of the loch on which we had been steaming: and quite near to it, probably at about the same distance as Vesuvius from Naples, was an active volcano at that moment in a state of chronic eruption.

On our arrival, to quote the stereotyped phrase of the newspapers, we got quite an enthusiastic reception. The warriors, having gone by some short cut, were before us; and, as they had in all probability had time to spread our fame, there was a big crowd of all sorts and conditions of people awaiting us. Nearest the landing-place stood a group of two-feathered chieftains, all of them, we were told, uncles or 'cousins of Eyvind. This was, as we rightly suspected, the justice-council of Hjetla. Farther back were the armed men, and behind them the general populace.

As we stepped ashore there was loud shouting, renewed as we were presented in turn to each of the councillors. Then, after Eyvind had spoken to the people in the common tongue, a very pretty ceremony took place. The ranks of the soldiers suddenly opened up, and half a dozen girls, dressed in white



The ranks of the soldiers suddenly opened up, and half a dozen girls, dressed in white and wearing the two feathers that denoted their rank, came forward bearing little baskets of cakes and other delicacies.

and wearing the two feathers that denoted their rank, came forward bearing little baskets of cakes and other delicacies. These they presented to Cecil, Wemyss, and me in succession; but when it came to the turn of the doctor, who stood next, we noticed that those around were indulging in sundry meaning looks and quiet winks, and that a general feeling of expectation seemed to prevail. The reason was soon apparent. Instead of the usual fare, we saw to our great amusement that our learned physician's basket was filled with small stones, pieces of rock and lava, and various roots!

'Jupiter Tonans!' cried Lorimer in amazement, peering at the specimens through his eye-glasses, and glancing alternately at them and at the contents of our baskets, 'I'm surely dreaming! What does all this mean?'

We laughed outright at his look of blank consternation, and our hilarity was echoed by our hosts, though in their faces eager anticipation was also marked.

'Don't you see it?' asked Cecil. 'Why, man, they believe that you live on stones and roots instead of ordinary food; and as it would be a shame to disappoint them, you must live up to their expectations! There's no help for it, doctor.'

The doctor didn't seem to relish the idea.

'I'll see them in Jericho first!' he said, emphatically. Then, turning to Eyvind, he asked for an explanation of the curious ceremony, and if it meant anything specially complimentary to himself. The chief, who was at first no wiser than ourselves, made inquiries, and replied at some length.

'It's easily accounted for,' the doctor continued, with a twinkle in his eye. 'The warriors have seen me collecting specimens of the geology and flora of the country whenever I have had a chance; and they have come to the conclusion that, like Nebuchadnezzar, I have a stomach adapted for the most extraordinary food. They meant it as a compliment, it appears. And that is all!'

But when it was seen that Lorimer did not rise to the occasion, the people looked somewhat disappointed.

‘Can’t you manage to swallow just a little?’ said Cecil persuasively. ‘They expect it, and it would add greatly to your reputation.’

‘Then I’m afraid,’ retorted the doctor, gently, ‘that I shall have to suffer—unless Mr Cecil cares to act in my stead.’

Mr Cecil declined; but, all the same, it was a long time before Lorimer heard the last of the basketful of rocks and roots.

This episode over, and the rest of our party having been (like us) gracefully treated, we continued on our way to the house. It was by far the largest we had yet seen in Islöken. In fact, it was more like a castle than an ordinary house, being built in the form of a quadrangle, with battlemented walls, a spacious interior court, and spacious rooms everywhere. The first impression of it, indeed, was one of spaciousness; the next, I think, of comfort.

‘Welcome to Hjetla!’ said Eyvind, as we entered a large hall, warmed by a huge fire roaring in a chimney that somehow reminded one of old English rooms at Christmas time, as seen in ancient pictures. ‘Welcome to Hjetla as my guests and my brothers!’ and with that he shook hands all round.

Needless to say, with such a reception, we were before long quite at home.





CHAPTER XX.

A SUMMONS FROM THE KING.

EYVIND, in the pleasant days which followed, showed us that there was more than one side to his nature. Though naturally and usually of a kindly temper, I have seen him fly into the greatest passions on the least provocation, and while under their influence be nothing less than an unreasoning tyrant. And yet he was positively adored by his people, more especially by his armed tribesmen. Nor was he merely a good soldier and local administrator; he revealed to us on more than one occasion that he had schemes in his brain that would doubtless have startled Orná had he known of them.

‘Look yonder,’ he said, one time when we had climbed to the summit (or as near to it as we could get) of the active volcano, and inspected its lava-beds and other phenomena—‘look yonder, and tell me if ye see two burning mountains close together.’

He pointed over the hills to the east, and, true enough, we caught a glimpse of the peaks he referred to, some twenty miles distant.

‘Around yon mountains,’ he continued, ‘is the district that once belonged to Thostar, whom I killed, and which is now mine. Yesterday, Hreidmar, my brother, with fifty chosen men, started, as you know, to govern it in my name; and before the next winter cometh I shall have five hundred spears more, trained as mine own, ready to fight for me and my cause.’

He paused, as if in contemplation of the pleasant prospect, and then went on: 'Ye may not know that mine are the only men in Islöken trained to act together, instead of man to man as our fathers did; and with them'—proudly—'I can defy any other tribe in all the land! Think ye,' he continued, 'that I have done this for nothing, or only that I might please myself? Think ye that it was merely for the love of slaughter that I slew Thostar and all his family?'

'I don't suppose so,' said the doctor; 'but if it was not, what *was* the reason?'

'Listen, and I shall tell thee,' he replied. 'Thou knowest, Loràmar, that the king of the land is Aleif of Hjalnord. Aleif, as it happens, has no sons, but he has one daughter they call Sigrida, who is as yet unmarried, and who is as beautiful in my eyes as the sun when it reappears after the winter days are past;' and there and then he indulged in some strong language concerning Sigrida's charms, which the doctor did not think it necessary to translate. 'I know not if Sigrida is willing, but when the time comes for the great council to choose for her a husband, I shall be ready with men and arms to make good my claim. And when Aleif dies, as die he must sometime, then I, Eyvind of Hjetla, shall reign in his stead—and reign, too, as *he* hath never reigned, so that I shall be master from Hjalnord to the great mountains of the south!'

From this it was to be gathered that with Eyvind's dream of love was mingled another of ambition; and that, like a wise man, he was taking time by the forelock in preparing for the struggle.

'And what will the other chiefs say to this?' inquired the doctor.

'I know not—nor care,' responded Eyvind. 'Long ago, 'tis said, my fathers for many years were kings, and were dispossessed by usurpers. But again, if I have my way, my race shall reign at Hjalnord, and let those who oppose it have care! But,' he continued after a little, in an altered

tone, 'this matters not to ye as strangers; and yet it may be of use to all of us in the days to come, for I have sent to tell the king that ye are here, so that sometime we shall have to travel towards the north. There, be sure, ye shall be well received, for I am in good favour with Aleif, and my influence in the council is already great.'

Shortly afterwards, in descending the hill to where the escort accompanying us had been left, Eyvind recurred to the subject of his soldiers.

'Yes,' he said, in the tone that at once lets one know that the speaker has been pursuing the same train of thought in his mind for some time, 'it may not be long before my men shall have an opportunity of showing their worth, and that, too, in defence of their chief and his guests.'

The doctor looked surprised.

'What!' he ejaculated. 'Is our presence here a matter of danger, Eyvind?'

'I intended not to have spoken of it,' replied the chief, 'but mayhap it is as well that ye should know. A day ago I had word from Reyðverá that Orná is gathering men and asking help from other chiefs, that he may come hither with an overwhelming force and demand ye to be given up. But'—with a smile—'we shall see, not which is master of the most followers, but which of us knoweth best the use of his sword and his spear.'

This was serious news, and as soon as we could have a word in private that evening we proceeded to talk it over.

'I don't know,' I said, 'the reason of Orná's unconquerable malignity towards us, but it appears to me that we're bound to be in perpetual hot water as long as we remain here. And not only that—we're also involving our friends in the same risks. Now what's to be done?'

'I can't make out what you're driving at, Godfrey,' said Cecil; 'but if you mean that we're to give ourselves up to Orná, I for one decidedly object to it. It may be selfish,

but I've no particular wish to be javelined just yet, merely because a queer old savage who doesn't know that you should love your enemies, takes it into his head to dislike us !'

Dr Lorimer nodded in approval.

'For my part,' said he, 'I have some cases of valuable specimens that I should like to carry to England in safety. Besides, Hamilton Nelson is still to be annihilated. So, if Eyvind wishes to fight, let him do it, and we shall help him to the best of our power to "smash up" Orná and the rest of them.'

Apparently the doctor, in spite of his learning, had not altogether conquered his inherited instincts.

'But, notwithstanding,' he went on, 'I certainly hope that we shall start for this place called Hjalnord before Orná turns up. I wish to see as much of the country as possible, to complete my observations. And we must remember, too, that we have only a month or two at the most, for we must reach the *Aurora* again by the beginning of August.'

At this time it was well into May, and we had already been a fortnight in Hjetla. The time passed quickly. Everywhere we found every facility for inquiry or observation. And now and again we had royal bear or wolf hunts amongst the mountains, and other forms of amusement and recreation to make our stay in the vale a pleasant one.

But the end of it was near. One evening, while Eyvind and his guests were at supper, we had the first intimation of the breaking of the storm. They were celebrating, I think, some festival connected with one of the gods, and the largest hall in the building was crowded with Eyvind's kinsmen and their families, met together as his guests. The scene was a remarkable one. At the head of the table, which was laden with substantial joints and dishes, sat the chief himself in full bear-skins; we were next to him, on either side; and then came his relatives in their order of precedence, with their wives, and sons, and daughters. Each man was fully armed, his shield and heavier weapons being placed by the

side of his seat; and at his back was a personal attendant, also armed to the teeth. The doctor asked Eyvind the reason of this, but the only reply he got was that 'it was a custom;' and in Islöken customs are stuck to as pertinaciously as in the most conservative country in the old world.

Supper was in progress, the ale-flagons were going round as merrily as they might (the quantity of drink consumed being surprising); it was then that we observed some commotion amongst the serving-men at the foot of the hall, and a tall man, haggard and dusty, as if he had travelled far, advanced up the room towards Eyvind.

'What is it?' demanded the chief, in the common tongue, of which by this time I knew a little—enough to make myself understood, and follow a slow speaker.

The guests laid down their knives and leaned eagerly forward as the man began his recital in a rapid tone, and with much gesticulation. As he went on, their excitement visibly increased, until, when he had reached what was evidently the culminating point of his narrative, all of them were on their feet, only awaiting the end to give utterance to their thoughts and feelings. For ourselves, we could merely guess his meaning by recognising such words as 'Orná' and 'Reydverá' here and there.

'Good!' was Eyvind's only comment when at last he had concluded; and then he gave the traveller into the hands of one of his servants, doubtless with orders to see him well treated.

Then, turning to his excited kinsmen, he said a few words to them, the effect of which was that they shouted again and yet again, until it seemed as if they had all gone mad. Swords were waved; the ladies joined in the enthusiasm; and finally the whole company broke into a song which was obviously one of war.

While the tumult continued, we, knowing nothing of its cause, could only sit still and watch. At length Eyvind seemed to remember us.

‘Strangers!’ he said, ‘I have just received the tidings that Orná, with a great army, has seized the little channel between the two lakes, and is advancing upon Hjetla. As yet I know not his errand, but he is welcome, for we are ready!’—a statement that evoked a loud shout. ‘In a few hours my men shall be assembled to sweep him and those with him into the water!’—another and louder shout. ‘Strangers! will ye fight with us and aid us to conquer—will ye lend us your help as if of our own race and blood?’

The enthusiasm must have been catching, for the doctor promptly responded in our names that we were with him to the death, at which the loudest shout of all rose from the chieftains present.

‘It is well!’ replied Eyvind.

He began his preparations with soldier-like alacrity. There was not a minute’s delay. At once the loud alarm-bell began to clang, and before long we heard through the open windows answering peals from distant hamlets or farms. Messengers were despatched in all directions to rouse the tribesmen, and spies to watch the movements of the enemy. Henceforth all was bustle; the ladies retired to their rooms, or to chambers provided for them, while their husbands or brothers hastened away to bring up their own men, or to aid in the general mobilisation. All night the warriors trooped in from every point of the compass, and before morning seven hundred were sleeping on their shields around the house.

While we were at breakfast a spy came in with the intelligence that Orná had camped the previous evening at the canal, but that he would doubtless move at daybreak, in the hope of taking Eyvind by surprise. This determined our chief to march at once; and so, by mid-day, we were encamped in a favourable position, directly in the path of the invading force. We were upon the summit of a low hill; on one side we had the lake, and on the other some broken and impassable ground, so that, at least, all the advantages of position were with us.

As the afternoon wore on, messenger after messenger arrived with news of the approach of Orná and his men ; and at last, about three o'clock, the vanguard came in sight half a mile distant. Before long the whole army was visible, and then we saw that in numbers it was greatly superior to ours, there being in it perhaps twice as many men.

'That is so,' said Eyvind, when some one pointed out the fact to him ; 'and so the defeat will be the worse for Orná, and the more honourable the victory to us ;' a remark that his followers enthusiastically cheered.

The enemy came on—I can't say steadily, for there was little regularity in their advance—until they were barely a quarter of a mile from the foot of our hill, and there they halted. Evidently they were ill pleased with the position we had taken up. If they had reckoned on a surprise, Eyvind's readiness must have been very galling to them ; and through our glasses we could see Orná and the other leaders in earnest consultation, no doubt as to what should now be done.

'Shouldn't we have a few shots at them?' inquired Cecil, anxiously. 'Even if we did no damage, it might be good practice.'

But, on the ground that hostilities hadn't yet commenced, I vetoed his half-serious suggestion ; and shortly afterwards one of the two-feathered gentlemen with whom Orná had been consulting was seen to be advancing towards us, unarmed and unattended.

'He is a herald,' explained Eyvind.

In a few minutes the herald had entered our lines, and having stated his business and demanded to see our chief, he was brought towards the spot at which, with his principal officers and us, Eyvind was standing.

'Orná of Reyðverá to Eyvind of Hjetla,' he began, in the old Norse, as the official language of the country. 'Thou hast with thee seven strangers from the Utgard,* who have

* Literally 'out-yard,' the name given to the land around Islöken uninhabitable on account of the cold.

entered this country only to do, with their magic born of Loki, hurt to its people, who have destroyed the sacred knolls of Odin and the council-house of Orn, and who have killed the son of Orná the chief. With these crimes they are charged, and that they may suffer the penalty of them Orná now demandeth of thee that they be given up to him forthwith. Then Orná shall depart out of Hjetla in peace; but if not, then he shall destroy thee, Eyvind, and all thy people, and make thy territory as his own. Thou hast his message!

Having thus spoken, the herald was about to depart, but by a gesture Eyvind stopped him.

‘And thou hast my answer, to carry with thee to thy master!’ he said. ‘Tell Orná that here I scorn his threats even as I scorned them at Orn. Tell him that he who enters Hjetla with armed men, whatever be his errand, is at war with its chief. Tell him that he knoweth on whose shoulders rests the blame of the crimes with which he has charged my guests. And tell him, finally, that if he wishes the strangers, to take them—for Eyvind of Hjetla is ready!’

And with that he turned away, while from his followers arose a cheer so loud and hearty that it must have been heard by the enemy. The messenger, after rather an apprehensive glance around, went—somewhat quickly.

‘Now we have the reason of Orná’s deadly hostility towards us,’ said the doctor; ‘the death of this son of his, probably in the fight around the house. Is that not so, Eyvind?’

‘Without doubt,’ answered the chief. ‘He was his only son, and be sure that if by any means he can accomplish it, he will rest not until he has avenged him. The more reason,’ he added, ‘why we should defeat him now, at once and completely. Only let him attack, and’—— The rest was left to conjecture.

But Orná was too old a bird, and could see too well the strength of his opponent’s position, to fall in with his arrangements so nicely. As the herald delivered his message,

we observed him through our glasses stamp up and down as if enraged, and thereafter consult again with his councillors. In the end, in obedience to his command, his men retreated a few yards to the shelter made by a thin group of dwarf birches.

This chafed the spirit of the impatient Eyvind. 'Orná was ever a coward!' he cried, and proposed to rush down and attack him on his own ground. But he was dissuaded, and instead sent a message to the effect that if 'Orná was *afraid* to give him battle with double his forces, he (Eyvind) was willing to fight him anywhere with an equal number of men on either side.'

To this challenge, at the moment, no answer was returned.

Thus, for the next hour or so, we sat watching each other, and just as we were beginning to become tired of the inaction the enemy was seen to be in motion. Evidently Orná had made up his mind to attack us. Slowly and cautiously his men advanced until they had covered half the distance between them and us, and then, halting for a moment, they divided into two parties, the larger of which held back as a reserve, whilst the smaller but picked division came towards us at a run.

Eyvind, meanwhile, had given a few rapid orders, and was ready. As the leading party charged up the hill, shouting some hoarse battle-cry, he lifted his sword, and, he leading, his whole force dashed downwards on the assailants. There was a shock, an instant of resistance and no more, before discipline and superior skill prevailed; and then, broken and demoralised, Orná's vanguard was fleeing towards his reserve. Now we saw his scheme. He had drawn up the larger division in square, meaning thus to receive the men of Hjetla as they charged down, on ground more favourable to himself. But he had reckoned without his host. The moment the vanguard was scattered Eyvind perceived the trap laid for him and ordered a stoppage; and, thanks to his discipline, on which Orná had failed to count, his force immediately

drew up and returned to its old station, within the shelter of the birch-wood.

'It is not,' he explained, 'that I fear to meet him, but I see not of what use it would be to throw away the lives of my men, when I shall gain the same result by waiting here.'

It was now that an interruption to the hostilities took place. Wemyss pointed out to us that two peculiar-looking carriages drawn by reindeer (of which more again) were rapidly approaching Orná from the opposite direction, and as they came nearer we saw that they contained several persons in red robes, and fully armed. On reaching the birch-wood the machines were drawn up, and a man bearing a weapon not unlike a halberd, and with a curious headpiece resembling a jester's cap, leaped out of the first

'Tis a herald from the king!' cried Eyvind; but what his errand can be, save'——

He stopped in perplexity; but he and we were not kept long in suspense. The herald for a little spoke to Orná, and then a message came inviting Eyvind and 'the strangers' to a consultation, to be held midway between the two forces.

'Tis in reference,' added the messenger, 'to a summons from King Aleif to give up to him the strangers from the Utgard, that he may himself speak with them and examine them before the great council that sits at Hjalnord.'





CHAPTER XXI.

OUR APPROACH TO THE POLE.

NONE of us objected to the course proposed, and on descending to the spot indicated we were immediately joined by Orná and the royal herald. The former greeted our friend stiffly, but took no notice of us.

‘This, Eyvind, is Egil, the herald of Aleif, the king,’ he commenced, without preliminary, ‘and he bears a command from the king that the strangers be delivered forthwith into his hand.’

Eyvind, with half-concealed contempt, turned from him to the herald.

‘Thou art welcome, Egil,’ he said; ‘but before thou givest thy message I must ask thee if thou art here as an herald to Orná alone, or to me?’

‘My message is this, Eyvind,’ he returned. “The command of Aleif, the king, to Orná of Reyðverá, or to whoever may have the custody of the strangers from the Utgard: that these strangers be delivered into the hand of Egil, my herald, to be brought to Hjalnord that I may have converse with them; that they be delivered forthwith, as I now command; and that to the chiefs through whose countries the strangers may pass on their way to Hjalnord my command be also given to treat them as chiefs, that they may not grumble in good faith of the people of Islöken.”

‘Good,’ said Eyvind, as if pleased. ‘And as it is I who have the custody of the strangers, it is to me that the

command is addressed, and Orná, without doubt, will now give up his claim and retire to his own district.'

Orná smiled in a vindictive and most unpleasant way, and we saw that he did not altogether relish this method of disposing of him.

'It is to me'—— he began.

But Eyvind interrupted him.

'The message is plain, and allows of no argument,' he said; 'and even if it did, I would argue not with thee. The strangers are, and always were, my guests; thou knowest that thou canst never take them; and so it becomes thee not, Orná, to demand them. But a weak cause needs big words. My case rests with thee, Egil.'

'And thou art right,' quickly responded the herald. 'The command lies—"to whoever may have the custody of the strangers."'

The facts were so indisputable that Orná could not but see that his game, for the present, was up.

'So be it,' he cried, but with an ugly look in his eyes. 'As it is the king's request, I go; but remember, Eyvind—and ye, strangers—that I shall never forget the harm ye have done me!'

And without another word he turned on his heel and walked off. Five minutes later, his army was on its homeward way.

'Ye have heard,' said Eyvind, as, along with the herald and his retinue, which had by this time come up, we returned to the camp—'ye have heard the words that have been spoken'—which the doctor had translated to us as they were uttered—'and ye must know that the time has come for ye to start for Hjalnord. But for the sake of safety I shall go with ye, and take with me a strong guard. Besides,' he added, ingenuously, 'I wish again to visit the king, with whom, as I have told ye already, I am in great favour. And it is as well to have a friend beside Aleif, lest Orná may find means to poison his mind against ye.'

To most of us the announcement was highly satisfactory; and to Dr Lorimer, in particular, it was a matter of peculiar gratification.

'Just what I wished!' he cried, 'that I might get all my observations completed. And the sooner we start the better!'

The chief, seemingly, was of the same opinion. Part of the warriors having been detached to watch Orná's withdrawal from Hjetla and see that he did no mischief, the rest of us returned at once to the capital.

There preparations for the long journey were begun with Eyvind's characteristic energy. His brother was summoned home to rule in his absence; a hundred of the best men were picked to act as an escort; and the swiftest reindeer and all the chariots available in the district were got ready. The latter merit a word of description. They are large, roomy machines, holding six persons and the driver, and constructed on the same principles as the earliest stage-coaches, with the exception that they are open. As the roads are smooth and well kept, being laid only over ground suitable for the purpose, although the longest détours may have to be made to gain this end, the want of springs is not so much felt as it might otherwise be. Each chariot is drawn by four reindeer, and sometimes by six, these animals in Islöken being specially trained to draw wheeled vehicles during the summer.

Two days later we started. With Eyvind in the leading chariot were the herald, Dr Lorimer, Cecil, and myself; in the next were Wemyss and Clements, along with one or two of the chief's councillors; and Gates and Jansen had charge of a special machine in which were the instruments, arms, and, in fact, all our luggage. Gates, by the way, had managed—how, even he could never explain—to pick up enough of both languages used in Islöken to make himself understood.

'It's just this,' he would say in answer to any inquiry on

the subject. 'You've only to get a sort o' grip of the common folk's lingo to get into the way o't, like; and as for what the doctor calls the Icelandic, it looks to me like Shetland—and every whaler kens it.'

The route, instead of being *viâ* Reyðverá, was to the east of Hjetla, at first right into the heart of the mountains in the midst of which Eyvind's valley lay. But soon we emerged upon a plain resembling that of Reyðverá, and only separated from it by a low range of hills. Across this we struck as nearly as possible in a bee-line. In this place, for the reasons I have already given, I do not intend to go into the particulars of the journey. It was interesting enough without being absolutely stirring. The principal excitement in it, indeed, was that of the chiefs and people through whose country we passed. Suffice it to mention, then, that we crossed by fords several considerable rivers flowing west, which must empty themselves into the sea on the coast of Torrens Land; and these, by means of their currents and comparatively high temperature, are doubtless the cause of the open water. Everywhere we found the same phenomena; and everywhere game was so plentiful that we kept the whole company supplied with fresh meat with the greatest ease.

As the sun now shone without intermission throughout the twenty-four hours, usually we began our day's progress quite early. One morning the doctor was strangely preoccupied, and I noticed that he seldom took his eyes off his compass except to make an occasional calculation. When we halted for the mid-day meal, I took occasion to rally him on his abstraction.

'What's the matter, doctor?' I asked. 'You, who are ordinarily the cheeriest and most talkative of mortals, seem to have some terrible secret on your mind. Nothing wrong, is there?'

'Nothing—in fact, far from it,' he replied; but still in an absent manner, as if his thoughts were in the clouds. 'But

I wish Gates would come up with the instruments. I can't do anything till I get them. As it is, I'm almost certain of it—but I shall have to make sure.'

Sure—of what? But as nothing was to be got out of him just then, I wandered off with my gun, thinking so much of Lorimer that I scarcely heeded the paradise of wild-fowl all around me, and missed more than one good chance.

When I returned I found a group of excited persons around the doctor, who himself appeared the most excited of them all. Gates, who was beside him, and had obviously been aiding him in his observations, was the only calm one present; but I knew that it would have taken nothing less than an earthquake or an explosion to excite him.

'Well, doctor,' I said, 'are you sure?—though of what, I'm yet ignorant.'

Lorimer didn't answer for a moment, and when he did, it was with a gravity that only emphasised, so to speak, the excitement in his eyes and on every line of his countenance.

'Yes, Oliphant,' said he, 'I'm sure of what I should have known before, but never suspected until to-day. For the last day or two I've had an idea of it, indeed; but it was only this morning that I found out that, whatever the roundabout way, we were going steadily north. I have just taken an observation, and checked it, which gives us our exact position. In a word'—speaking slowly and impressively—'*at this moment we're only eighty-one geographical miles from the North Pole!*'

We gasped in astonishment; the Pole had been so far from our thoughts of late that we could scarcely realise the fact.

'And that's not all,' the doctor went on, more in his usual enthusiastic manner. 'There's every reason to believe that the Pole itself is in Islöken, and not far from this Hjalnord to which we're going. According to Eyvind, we're still four days' journey from it, in the same direction. Now, we make about thirty miles a day; four days give us a hundred and twenty miles; and, allowing for détours, that brings

us very near it. And yet I can hardly believe it—that we shall discover the NORTH POLE, that point which has been the central idea of every Arctic explorer for centuries !’

And the thought was certainly one that almost lay too deep for words. Again the doctor went into a brown study. As for the rest of us, no doubt we should have done the same had not some one happened to announce that dinner was ready ; and dinner, as we know, is as a rule an excellent antidote to reflection and sentiment. With Gates, at anyrate, it was so.

‘Well, well,’ said that astute Scot, as he carefully packed up the instruments, ‘the doctor *is* a queer man in some ways, but I cannot say I quite comprehend what he thinks he’ll find at the North Pole. From what I’ve heard tell, it’s only what they speak o’ as a geographical expression. If ye was to get something substantial now—like the gold they used to get in Californy, for instance—I might see through it. But only a sort o’ equator without a Neptune—ugh !’ with which expressive comment he went off to his meal.

Eyvind, also, seemed to have much the same idea. He found it hard to understand our sudden excitement for no apparent reason ; and as for the doctor’s explanations, however learned they might be, they were of course utterly incomprehensible to him.

‘You tell me that for ages your fathers have striven to reach this “Nord-Pole,”’ he would say, in perplexity ; ‘but if it is in Islöken, and they never heard of Islöken, how could they have done so ? Surely it must be a wonder, to bring ye so far ; and yet I know it not, nor where it is. Gates says it is nothing ; but’—expressively—‘ye are not mad, and Loràmar is not mad ! It is strange !’

And in his perplexity, in spite of all our efforts, he persisted in remaining.

It was not long, however, before the thought of it was driven from his head—and for the time being, from our own—by a more startling event. We were again amongst moun-

tainous scenery, and that evening, on approaching a defile in the midst of it, Eyvind sent forward half of his men as an advanced guard, on the ground, as he said, that it was a favourable meeting-place for a turbulent tribe that was little better than one of robbers. It was as well that he did so. The pass was a narrow one between two walls of rock, with barely room in some parts to allow the chariots to pass. Scarcely had we entered it than we heard a loud shout, and, looking up, saw the sides of the defiles dotted with armed men, the figures of some of them silhouetted against the sky, and others lower down. If their purpose was to surprise us they had chosen their moment well, the first part of our escort being considerably in advance, while the rest had not as yet entered the pass.

‘Enemies?’ asked the doctor.

Eyvind nodded; he was too busy watching their movements to speak. Suddenly he uttered a sharp cry, as if of warning.

‘Look out!’ shouted Cecil at the same time.

We were conscious of a whistling sound about our ears, and several javelins and arrows rattled into the chariot, the driver and two of the reindeer falling under the former. It was by a miracle that those inside it escaped unscathed.

If it had been the intention of the assailants to kill *us* (as seemed evident from the fact that none of the other chariots were attacked), they had lost their last chance. At a run the rearguard entered the pass, and those in advance, turning, began to scale the rocks in pursuit. We, on our part, opened a fusilade with our firearms that brought down more than one. Doubtless they had expected to be successful at the first, or had never imagined that we should make such a prompt resistance, and after keeping their places for a second they began to scramble away as fast as they could climb. Away on either side went the men of Hjetla in pursuit. The latter were good mountaineers, and, notwithstanding the start gained by the brigands, five or six of them were over-

taken, and with scant ceremony tumbled down the hill to where the chief was standing. Most, however, got clear off, but they left behind them three killed and two wounded, besides those captured. On our side the injury to the driver was very slight.

‘Now we shall see how Eyvind dispenses justice,’ said the doctor, with some curiosity.

The inquiry was of course conducted in the vernacular, the herald taking a prominent part in it; but we could only stand by and try to guess from a recognisable word here and there what was going on. At last the chief turned to us.

‘It is as I thought,’ he said. ‘This is Orná’s doing. By the promise of much reward he has induced the tribe to attack us, not saying that we should have with us the royal herald. Well, it is done: the tribe must bear the penalty; and with Orná I shall deal when the time comes.’

‘And these men?’ the doctor ventured to inquire, noticing that they were being removed by the escort.

‘Shall reap what they have sown!’ replied Eyvind, with an angry gleam in his eyes, and a gesture that plainly told their fate.

Into the matter we thought it as well not to inquire further, but a little later we heard a cry or two that were only too suggestive. The men, without doubt, richly deserved their doom.

But for a vexatious delay we should have reached Hjalnord well within the time specified by Eyvind. On the day previous to that on which we should have arrived, we were met by couriers with the intelligence that part of the road had been destroyed by the descent of lava streams from a volcano in eruption, and that we should either have to wait until a new path was made, or make a circuit of fifty miles. The latter alternative was chosen; but the delay was the more tantalising from the fact that, by the doctor’s calculations, we were within twenty-five miles of the Pole!

‘However,’ said Lorimer, cheerfully, ‘it’s some consolation



'That is Hjalnord,' said Eyvind, 'the seat of the kings of Islöken; yonder in the middle is the hill from which the law is given to the people; and beyond, ye see the great snow-clad mountains on which neither animal nor plant can live.'



that it can't disappear like the *Northern Pharos*, and, after all, when we take into account the hundreds of years during which it has been the goal of every civilised nation, surely one day sooner or later doesn't matter !'

Notwithstanding, nobody was more impatient than he to reach Hjalnord ; and when, a day or two afterwards, we came in sight of the city as we surmounted a range of hills, nobody was more eager to get a better view of it. It lay right below us, in a valley surely the most beautiful in the whole Paradise of the North, by far the largest town we had yet seen in the land, regularly and systematically laid out and surrounded by walls. What struck us most was that all the streets converged upon a low, flat-topped hill, like the spokes of a wheel upon the hub. Around the town were fields and gardens highly cultivated ; everywhere the geysers and hot-water springs, to the sight of which we had become so accustomed that we should have thought it strange if there had not been any ; and here and there a stream or small lake. In the distance was a range of snow-covered mountains rising to an immense height, beyond which, we were told, no man had ever penetrated.

'Yes,' said Eyvind with some pride, as he noticed our admiration, 'that is Hjalnord, the seat of the kings of Islöken ; yonder in the middle is the hill from which the law is given to the people ; and beyond, ye see the great snow-clad mountains on which neither animal nor plant can live.'

'It is magnificent !' cried the doctor, forgetting for a moment his one idea ; but it was only for a moment, and then he added : 'But let us get down to it as quickly as we can. There are many things to be done, my friends.'

The descent was not so easy as it appeared, however, and it was late in the evening before we approached the gate (there was only one) of the city of Hjalnord. We were evidently expected, for the gate was opened as we came near, and two heralds, followed by a large company of soldiers, came forth

to meet us. To them we were presented by Egil, and in the name of King Aleif they welcomed us to Hjalnord and assured us of a hospitable reception.

‘This being the birthday of the king,’ supplemented one, ‘he holds to-night his great feast; and it is his command that if the strangers arrive they and the chiefs and councillors with them attend him at once in his palace.’

Although we were tired and sleepy, there was no gainsaying this. ‘We must obey,’ said Eyvind; and so, descending from our chariots and falling into line behind the heralds, we passed through the gateway and along a broad street, leaving our luggage in charge of the escort. The houses, we saw, were as a rule large and roomy, built much in the same style as Eyvind’s château, and the palace itself, which was situated under the shadow of the ‘Law Rock,’ opposite another large edifice, was merely on a bigger scale. There were few people about, except one or two groups of armed men around the palace. From this, as we neared it, we heard sounds of mirth and revelry which told us that the birthday feast of King Aleif was at its height, and told us also, only too plainly, of the nature of the festival.





CHAPTER XXII.

DR LORIMER'S GREAT DISCOVERY.

PASSING along several corridors we reached a doorway hidden by a thick curtain, and on drawing it aside and entering, we found ourselves in a large room, heated by two fires. On each side of a long table running right down the apartment, and covered with viands of every kind, there must have been at least thirty men. Most of these—all, in fact, except the few who had drunk not wisely, but too well, of the king's ale—leaped up as we entered, and when they saw who we were, there were loud cries of 'Eyvind! Eyvind!' Evidently our friend was popular.

Without taking much notice of the demonstration, the heralds led us towards the head of the table, at which stood a man just past the meridian of life, with a certain look on his thin face as if of weakness. His hair, too, was white, although his movements were still those of physical strength and vigour. And his eyes, as we were conscious by his scrutiny as we advanced, were bright and keen. It hardly needed Eyvind's whispered intimation to tell us that this was Aleif, the king: his very dress and arms were sufficient to point him out amongst the rest as the chief of all.

'Then ye are the strangers of whom I have heard?' he said, as we came to a stop opposite him. The fact was indisputable; and, after another close scrutiny, he continued: 'It is good! Ye are welcome to Hjalnord, in my own name and in the name of my great council.'

And, turning, he gave an order to those standing beside

him. Immediately four or five chiefs on each side of the table vacated their places, which he motioned to us to take. We did so; he and the company seated themselves; and then we seated ourselves in this order—to his right Cecil, Wemyss, Clements, and Jansen, and to his left the doctor, myself, Eyvind, and Gates respectively.

'Seems to me,' whispered Lorimer in my ear, after a glance around, 'that we're in for a regular "wassail-bout"—a survival from the tenth century. Doesn't the scene remind you of it?'

As I surveyed it, I had to admit that it certainly did. The three-score men, all of the dominant race, and bearing on their faces the proofs of their kinship to our Viking forefathers; the large metal flagons full to the brim of the national beverage; the hall itself, with the weapons and shields upon its walls reflecting the gleam of fire or midnight sun: all these tended to create an illusion that we were in reality attending a 'wassail-bout' in the days of Harold Haarfager.

Food meanwhile was placed before us, and until we had satisfied ourselves the king would listen to no conversation. But during the interval, we noticed, he paid much attention to his ale-cup, as indeed did every one of his guests. Then the doctor had to tell our story (or as much of it as Aleif was likely to understand), to explain whence we came, our purposes in coming, and generally to make his majesty acquainted with our history. By his look he was much interested; and when the narrative came to an end, he filled up his flagon and pledged us.

'I would hear more of ye and the land from which ye come,' he said, 'and of the wisdom and power which doubtless are yours. "'Tis our own fault," as the proverb says, "if from a stranger we learn nothing new." But it must be another time, for now the feast must go on. Ye are my guests, however, and shall be as long as ye care to remain here.'

And he shook hands all round, with a warmth that might have gratified us had we known how much of it was heartfelt, and how much the effect of the ale.

The flagons were refilled and emptied time after time, and at a signal from the king several men carrying instruments not unlike harps advanced to the head of the room, where one of them immediately commenced a recital in a sing-song, monotonous voice, accompanying himself on his harp—as by its sound it was. Occasionally his companions joined in, when the effect was not unmusical. Every one listened with the greatest attention to the skald, who, we were told by Eyvind, was narrating an entirely new ballad in reference to the feats of some former king. No doubt it was very interesting, but we were not sorry when it was finished amid a round of applause.

Then one of the others struck up a song. For a moment or two he had it all to himself, but as soon as the company could pick up the tune they joined in with heart and soul. The noise made was terrific; certainly it could not have been worse if a congregation of a thousand persons had been singing in a room a hundred feet by thirty.

An interval followed, during which more ale was consumed—so much, indeed, that we could not comprehend how the drinkers disposed of it. I don't know if we were expected to do in Rome as the Romans did; but if we had tried we could never have succeeded, even though our lives had depended on it. Eyvind, I am bound to say, showed no backwardness; and as for the rest, they were all much too busily engaged to watch our capabilities in the way of imbibing.

Cecil, however, was in a more awkward position, being directly under the eyes of Aleif, who had seemed to take a liking to him at first sight. Observing that his majesty himself never passed the huge flagon from which the cups were filled, and that he looked with displeasure on any one who did, my brother was in a fix. He did not wish to

displease our royal host; he knew that to keep pace with the natives was beyond his powers. But he soon struck upon an expedient. On the table between him and the king was a huge haunch of venison, and behind this he sheltered his cup, drinking just a little each time, and filling up as the flagon came round. In this way he managed to keep himself sober, and at the same time—as was afterwards to be proved—to rise in the king's estimation with every cupful he was supposed to have drunk.

So, for five long hours after our arrival, the bout went on. We could not leave the feast, of course; sleepy as we were, we had to sit and listen to song, ballad, and story that were as Hottentot to us, and to watch the steady drinking and the gradual capitulation of the drinkers.

'When will this end?' I inquired of Eyvind, who was still pegging away at it as if it were enjoyable, as perhaps it was to him.

'Not until the king chooses to stop,' he replied; and as Aleif appeared to be the hardiest of all, I leaned back in my seat with little hope of a speedy release. But it came sooner than I expected. The king appeared suddenly to realise that the flagon was circulating much more quickly, and that most of his supporters had given it up; and with the knowledge came the reflection, I suppose, that he also had had enough of it. Accordingly, he issued an order; the minstrels sang a last song and then disappeared, and all was over.

'Strangers,' he said, 'the feast is now ended. I have given my orders that rooms be prepared for ye, and when ye are refreshed I shall hope to see ye again.'

So saying, he rose and attempted to walk off, forgetting the quantity of ale he carried; and he would have fallen had not Cecil promptly caught and steadied him until two of his attendants relieved him. Aleif's head was clear enough, and looking at Cecil with something like admiration, he said, 'Thou art a man!' as he left the room.

For ourselves, we followed the servants with alacrity to our chambers, where it was not long before we were in the deepest slumber, dreaming of quaffing whole barrells of nut-brown ale around a gigantic post yecept the North Pole!

When I awoke it was nearly eleven o'clock, and hearing familiar voices somewhere near me, I dressed and passed directly from my room into the interior court of the palace, which was laid out as a garden. There I found Cecil and Wemyss, and a minute or two later we were joined by Dr Lorimer.

'Nebody seems to be up in this place yet,' said the latter, 'and I'm anxious to get a meridian observation to-day. Where on earth can Gates be, or Eyvind, or any one who can tell me where my instruments are?'

'Gates and Clements have disappeared,' replied Cecil, 'and as for our native friends, no doubt they haven't recovered yet from last night's carouse.'

'It's a wonder to me that you have,' said the doctor, with a laugh. 'How many gallons of ale in all did you drink, or pretend to drink? But, joking aside, I wish we could unearth somebody, for I feel more miserable the longer the settlement of this question is delayed.'

Knowing that to which he referred, we shared his feelings in a less degree. But in a minute he had his wish; on turning a corner of the quadrangle we came upon a little side-court hidden away in a quiet nook, and were just in time to catch a glimpse of a lady in white disappearing through a doorway, whilst our friend Eyvind stood near, trying hard to look innocent.

'The old game!' muttered Cecil, who may be supposed to know something of it. 'Ask him, doctor, who the lady is, and if we are to congratulate him.'

The doctor did so.

'The lady is Sigrida, the daughter of Aleif, whom I met here by chance,' was the dignified answer; on hearing which

each of us, I think, laughed in his sleeve, having somewhere or other heard the same reply before.

'And now, if ye will,' he went on, as if eager to change the subject, 'I will show ye the town—or, better still, the wonders of the Law Rock which ye saw from the mountains.'

We were agreeable, but before we started the doctor asked how he could get at his instruments.

'It is easily done,' said the chief. 'I shall tell one of the slaves as we go out to send them after thee to the Law Rock.'

'All right,' replied Lorimer. 'I suppose the rock will do as well as any other place.'

Accordingly, as we passed through the entrance-hall Eyvind spoke to one of the servants loitering about, evidently describing to him what to bring, and then he followed us into the street, in which he pointed out the opposite building as that in which the great council of the nation met. Some one referred to the size and appearance of the houses as compared with those of Reyðverá, for instance; but the reason, he said, was that an earthquake had never yet, as far as was known, occurred in Hjalnord, and that, therefore, people had confidence that if they erected anything it would not be demolished in a day or two, as was the case elsewhere.

'But look!' cried Cecil, interrupting this explanation; 'yonder are Clements and Gates perched on the summit of the Law Rock, like venerable seagulls on a solitary islet!'

The rock itself, now directly in front of us, was a square block of basalt about five hundred feet in height, with smooth, precipitous sides and a flat top. I have never come across another exactly of the same kind or configuration, nor even read of one. On a knoll in the centre of the summit, used as a rostrum from which proclamations were made, sat Gates, and by his side stood Clements, both of them apparently admiring the view.

Eyvind led the way towards one of the angles, at which, we saw as we approached, a narrow and precarious path led towards the hill-top. Up this we ascended perhaps half-way,

and then to our amazement we observed a large fissure in the rock, from which was visible an open and well-lit space, as if of an immense cave within the mountain. Here Eyvind stopped.

'Within,' he said, impressively, 'are the great wonders to which I referred a minute ago. Shall we go in?'

I nodded, and we were about to do so when the doctor stopped us.

'Here comes the man with the instruments!' he cried, excitedly. 'I shall have to see this place another time; just now I must take my observations. Clements and Gates will help me—there's time yet! Excuse me, will you?'

So leaving him where he was, we trooped through the fissure at the heels of the chief, who whispered to me in the native dialect, which by this time I had nearly mastered:

'Is Loramar, then, still looking for this *Nord-Pole* which is nothing and yet may be found? By this time his foolishness is surely gone, or he must indeed be more foolish than he seems.'

I did not answer, for at that moment the narrow passage we had been threading broadened out and finally merged into a great cavern or hollow space, that by its *feeling* alone, so to speak, gave one the impression of vastness. In reality, it was of no stupendous length or breadth. Indeed, when our eyes became accustomed to the faint twilight that penetrated into it through a thousand cracks in the roof and walls, we could distinctly make out all its dimensions, except that of depth. We ourselves were standing upon the extreme edge of a narrow shelf that seemed to run right round it, and at our feet there was nothing but blackness—the rock sheered perpendicularly down so far as, at that point, our eyesight reached.

Following Eyvind, we groped our way along the ledge for a little distance, until we came to a part at which it dipped considerably; and there, at its lowest point, the chief halted

and told us to listen. We did so, and heard a low sound as of distant breakers; and on looking over the edge I thought I could distinguish, many scores of feet below, the presence of water. I asked our guide if I were right.

'It is water,' he responded.

'Then what is marvellous in that?' I demanded, adding to the others: 'It would be more marvellous if there was no water at all at the foot of a hole like that.'

'Wait,' was the simple reply.

A few minutes passed, and then he called our attention to the fact that the faint sound was momentarily growing louder and louder. Then, gazing eagerly into the abyss, we observed that the water at its foot was beginning to rise, and that it rose higher and still higher, until finally it was only twenty feet below us. Thus it remained, agitated and broken, for perhaps ten minutes; and then, as suddenly as it had risen, it subsided to its normal position. And, at the same time, the noise also died away.

We watched the progress of the phenomenon with interest and some surprise.

'Is it often thus?' I asked Eyvind.

'Continually—at stated times,' said he. 'But no man knoweth the cause, neither where the water comes from, nor to what is due the sudden rising and falling. Mayhap Loramar may know'—this with a meaning smile. 'Tis said that once it rose so high that it reached the ledge, and flowed through the fissures and down the mountain side.'

Nor was this the only wonder of the place. Having again followed the ledge for a hundred yards or so, we were pulled up short at a transverse ledge; and here we saw that the abyss was cut into two by a solid wall of rock, in the middle widening out into an islet (if it may so be called) about forty yards in circumference. On one side of this was the wonderful tidal wave; on the other, according to Eyvind, nothing but an unfathomable chasm, the depth of which was beyond the calculation of man. As proof of his assertion, he threw

in a piece of rock, which fell and fell until we could no longer hear the sound of its descent.

'Shall we cross?' he inquired, pointing to the natural causeway, not more than six feet broad, that connected the ledge with the islet.

I looked at it somewhat doubtfully, but before I had time to reply the chief himself was on his way across: After that, of course, we had no alternative but to follow, which we did rather gingerly and with much care; and then we found that the spot was covered with little knolls that were highly convenient as seats. On the other side it was also connected with the ledge.

'Here,' said Eyvind, as we seated ourselves, 'the great council met for many ages, before the city of Hjalnord was built, and while the land was full of turbulence and warfare. For the council it was the only place of perfect safety in Islöken, for the Law Rock can be held by few against a multitude; and 'tis said that the people cared not that they should leave it, as they held it almost sacred.'

And he went on to give us many instructive particulars of 'the brave days of old,' that might have interested us more had our knowledge of the language been less imperfect.

At last, seeing no signs of a renewal of the phenomenon, I suggested that we might join the doctor above; and so, crossing the other causeway, we emerged into the open air by a fissure in the opposite side from the one by which we had entered. As we were climbing to the summit we heard loud shouts quite near us, and the next moment were confronted by Gates, who was in a terrible state of excitement.

'Quick, Mr Oliphant!' he cried. 'I don't know what to do! I think the doctor's daft, and Mr Clements as bad! They're both like it, anyway. Quick! or they'll be doing somethin' desperate to themselves!'

The man's concern was so obvious that I lost no time. Heedless of the steepness of the path, I ascended at full speed, falling more than once, but always picking myself up

almost before I touched the ground, and again dashing on in the stoker's wake. In a minute I had reached the summit, to find the doctor and Clements shouting as if demented around a British flag they had raised on the mound I have mentioned, upon which were also the instrument-tripod and most of the instruments.

I touched the doctor on the shoulder.

'What's wrong?' I demanded. 'What great discovery have you made now, Lorimer?'

For a moment he seemed speechless, and could only seize my hand and shake it with the utmost fervour, repeating the same operation on the others as they appeared. At length he found his voice.

'The greatest discovery of all!' he exclaimed. 'At last we have succeeded! At last perseverance and endurance, added to good fortune, have enabled us to reach the farthest northern point of the world! At last we've found it! *Here*, Oliphant—at this point—where this Union Jack is—where we, members of the Randolph Torrens Expedition, are standing—*is the North Pole itself!*'



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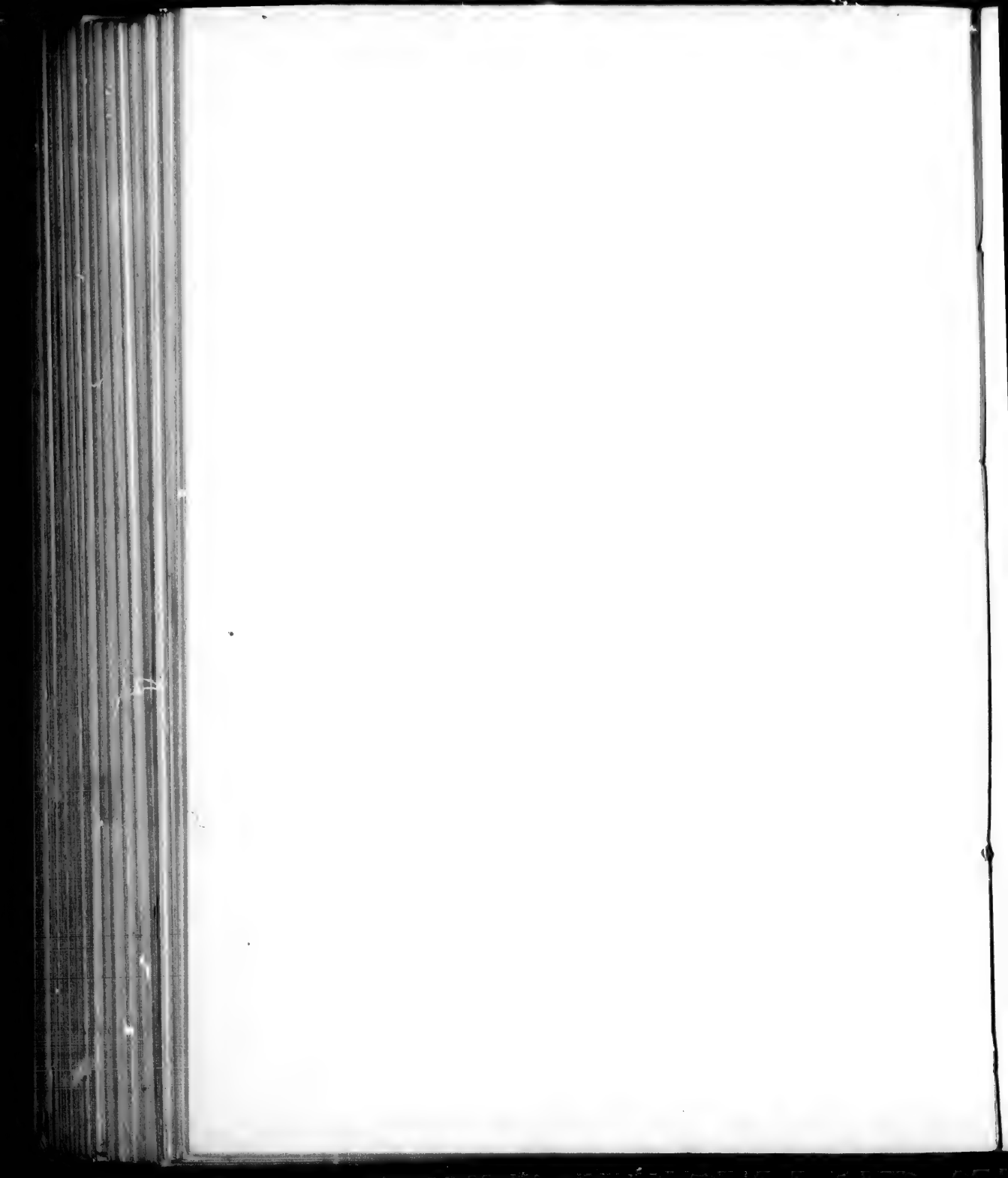
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'At last we've found it! *Here*, Oliphant—at this point—where this Union Jack is—where we, members of the Randolph Torrens Expedition, are standing—is *the North Pole itself!*'





CHAPTER XXIII.

SIGRIDA.



AM afraid that, as the doctor thus impetuously announced his great discovery, we were at first more incredulous than he expected. But his manner at once showed us how much he was in earnest.

'*The North Pole!*' I exclaimed, involuntarily looking round as if I expected to see it.

'Yes,' he quickly replied. 'There can be no mistake about it. Clements and I have checked our observations and calculations in every possible way, and the result is invariably the same. We're standing on it! Look wherever you like, you're looking to the south. Here there's neither east nor west, nor even north. The whole world, so to speak, is under our feet—and, my friends, we are British!'

His tone was so sincere as to be, in itself alone, almost convincing and five minutes' examination of his figures put the matter beyond a doubt.

'One can hardly realise that we have really solved the vexed question of what the Pole is,' I said, telling the doctor of the strange phenomenon below us, which now assumed a new aspect when considered in the light of the discovery made since we had seen it.

'And that reminds me,' suddenly said Cecil, with a twinkle in his eye, 'of the ancient legend that, when the Pole was discovered, a Scotsman would be found sitting on its summit. No doubt you have all heard of it. Well,' he went on, in a tone of assumed solemnity, 'nothing is more extraordinary

than the way in which these legends are verified—as, for instance, witness this very case.'

We stared.

'Why! How do you make that out?' inquired the doctor.

'It isn't a case of "making out" at all. It's a statement of simple fact. When we issued from the house this morning, whom did we see sitting on the Pole, apparently quite at home? It was Gates. And isn't Gates, as he has told us many times, a native of Scotland, and of Dundee? Thus it is, curiously and providentially, that prophecies are fulfilled!'

Whilst we were laughing at this coincidence (and nobody enjoyed it more than Gates himself) we noticed that our old comrade Egil was ascending one of the paths. Aleif, he said on reaching us, was about to partake of his mid-day meal, and desired our presence at his table. This reminded us that, as we had tasted nothing since the previous evening, we should be rather hungry, and thus bringing with it the knowledge that we were so, in spite of the startling events of the morning, we began the descent of the Law Rock with surprising alacrity. As the doctor said, 'the Pole could wait, but not our inner man.'

'So, Loràmar, thou hast found this *Nord-Pole* of which thou wast in search, and found it not to be nothing, as thou saidst, but the Law Rock!' was the comment of Eyvind, delivered on our way to the palace. The astute chief had gathered so much, and formed his own conclusions, from our rather erratic behaviour on the mount.

It is true, Eyvind,' returned the doctor; 'we have indeed found it.'

'Then of what good is it to thee?' was the not unnatural retort. 'It is of no use that I can see, for ye cannot carry it away with ye when ye leave this land for your own.'

This was undeniable; but fortunately for the doctor we arrived just then at the palace, and thus he was saved the trouble of a long and useless explanation.

Egil led us into a different room from that with which we were acquainted, but furnished much in the same way, with the exception of the table. Near the fire sat the king, and opposite to him a lady whom we recognised at once as his daughter Sigrida. As she rose on our entrance we saw that she was tall and graceful, clad in a simple robe of white, looped up here and there with hooks of copper, and with a scarf of some soft substance draped gracefully around her neck, the ends of it dangling over her right shoulder. Her features may not have been very regular, but they bore the mark of refinement and distinction; and her eyes—large, quick, and of a deep blue, in which there was sometimes a suggestion of black—more than compensated for any defect she might have. Owing to an arrangement of her hair on the top of her head, she had a more dignified look than might otherwise have been the case, more especially as she seemed of a quiet and modest nature. Altogether, however, she was undoubtedly the most handsome Eve we had yet seen in the Paradise of the North, and Eyvind's choice was certainly a credit to his good taste.

In turn we were presented by the king, and I watched Sigrida closely to see the effect upon her. She scrutinised each of us critically, and yet with the curiosity of her sex; and I was hardly surprised that her glance finally rested upon Cecil, for he was without doubt the best looking amongst us. More than once her eyes travelled from my brother to Eyvind (on whom they always rested with a softer light in them), and if she did compare them, I am certain that the one to whom she awarded the palm was not of our party.

Whatever *her* ideas, those of her father were most obviously in Cecil's favour. He had greeted him with exceptional warmth, making him sit down by his side; and when, after some desultory conversation, dinner was announced, it was on his arm that he led the way into the dining-hall. Jansen was there, apparently not quite at his ease among the members of the council; and on seating ourselves, Eyvind

adroitly manœuvred until he got next to Sigrida. The lunch was substantial, the drink again being ale, warmed and spiced by the addition of some native herbs.

During its course we managed to get on such good terms with Aleif that, at its conclusion, he proposed to show us in person over his gardens and around the town.

There was no delay. Within ten minutes of the end of the meal a motley crowd—including Sigrida and Eyvind, the seven of us, all the council, and a company of soldiers that kept at a convenient distance behind us—was thronging through the quadrangle at the heels of Aleif. Coming out at the back of the palace, we entered a great park planted with occasional groups of small birches, in some parts highly cultivated, and in others covered with dense undergrowth. In the latter hares and other game were plentiful, and must have done much damage to the cultivated portions.

Here Aleif handed over his daughter to the care of Cecil and walked on with the doctor, with whom he entered into a long conversation concerning us and our land, showing a curiosity and interest that even Lorimer found it hard to appease. As for Cecil, he appeared, in spite of his very fragmentary knowledge of the language, to get on exceedingly well with Sigrida, and with some amusement I noticed that Eyvind, who was walking with me, did not altogether relish this. His eyes and his thoughts remained fixed on them, and in consequence he either did not answer my questions at all, or did so in an utterly irrelevant manner. At last, in turning a corner, Sigrida happened to shoot him a glance, and the ungrateful being, without even an apology, immediately deserted me and took up his station on her left. Human nature is the same from the Equator to the Pole.

But in the end he did not gain much by the change. Whether it was that the princess thought it her duty to devote herself to Cecil as a stranger, or, with woman-like coquetry, she delighted in cooling her lover's ardour, it is

impossible to say; but certain it is that the chief of Hjetla got scarcely a word or a look from her. And accordingly the green-eyed monster began to gain a little influence over his savage heart.

Thus for some time we wandered up and down the park, Wemyss and I extending our acquaintance with the native chiefs, and the rest engaged as I have mentioned. Then the king motioned to Cecil and me to come forward, and handed the princess over to Dr Lorimer, who lost no time in improving the opportunity with as much ardour as if he had been twenty years younger.

'Thy friend they call Loramar,' said his circumpolar majesty to me, 'has shown me that ye are of a wonderful people, but yet I have seen little of your wonder. I should like,' he added somewhat peremptorily, 'to witness those marvellous powers of which Orná has sent to tell me, and Egil, my herald, has reported.'

More by force of habit than by design Cecil had brought his Winchester repeater with him, and he was the only one of us who had his rifle. On him, therefore, must devolve the temporary rôle of Merlin.

'Ah! *thou art a man!*' repeated Aleif, turning approvingly to Cecil, when I told him that my brother would favour him with an exhibition of our magic. And from that moment, I believe, he had the fixed and unchangeable opinion that Cecil alone possessed the startling and occult powers of which he had heard so much.

We were then at the foot of the park. On the other side of a narrow and sedgy stream was a stretch of rocky surface, over which myriads of ducks and similar birds were hovering, and to our right was a piece of waste ground literally swarming with hares. Curiously enough, these little animals seemed perfectly oblivious of our presence at not more than fifty yards' distance, and not in the least frightened. There was thus a splendid field for the exercise of Cecil's talents.

Guessing that something unusual was in the wind, the whole company, aristocrats and soldiers, had clustered closely behind the king, and were now standing at attention. Cecil, pointing to a rocky bluff on which was a cluster of birds all unconscious of the fate in store for some of them, asked me to tell Aleif to keep his eyes on it. I did so. Then, taking a steady aim, my brother fired. Wheeling quickly round without waiting to see what damage he had done, he covered an audacious-looking hare on the right just as it turned to flee ; and over it went, as dead as one of the ducks at which he had fired a moment before.

As the double report was heard and its consequences seen, there arose a prolonged howl, and one or two nervous individuals even lost their heads and bolted. The king himself rolled his eyes uneasily, and gave a little shriek. As for his daughter, she uttered a louder one, and in her consternation would have fallen if she had not been supported by the strong arms of Eyvind, who thereafter completely forgot that she was in that position, and forgot also all his jealous and uncharitable feelings ! And at the same time there was a horrid discord as the air was filled with thousands of screaming birds.

‘Shall I do it once more?’ Cecil inquired, through me, as he saw that the bluff was again occupied by a flock of birds, heedless of their comrade’s untimely end. Aleif nodded ; his courtiers looked a little apprehensive.

Another bird fell, but this time every one stood firm, though Eyvind slyly took advantage of the alarm to clasp Sigrida yet more firmly round the waist. And Sigrida, strangely enough, did not appear to object.

‘More ! more !’ shouted the king, who, having got over his fears, was now eager for further indulgences.

Cecil, looking up and seeing that the air was still filled with the wheeling and bewildered birds, complied by firing at random into the midst of them until his magazine was empty. The result was beyond all expectation. Down fell

the slaughtered victims in such multitudes that the ground was nearly covered with them, and in awed whispers the onlookers assured each other that it must be the work of a god. In his ecstasy Aleif danced about and cried 'More! more!' until he was pulled up short by a slight misadventure. As he was eagerly gazing at the falling birds, a heavy brent-goose that had been winged descended on his upturned face, and with such force that it brought him sharply to the earth.

'Another victim!' cried the doctor, as we ran forward to his assistance.

But immediately he was on his feet again, and now we had an example of his headstrong temper. Taking the goose by the neck (it was still alive), he dashed it amongst the soldiers; then, stooping down, did the same with a few more; and having thus relieved his feelings, and laughed heartily at his well-directed aims, he was himself again!

'It is good!' he said, though his warriors had no reason to think so. 'Thou hast indeed wondrous powers, Cecil!'—with a glance, half of admiration and half of awe, at the Winchester—'and Orná and Egil have but spoken the truth of thee! Never did I think mine old eyes should see such a slaying of the birds of the air within so short a time! To-night we shall feast upon them, in honour of thee and thy comrades!'

And with that, after giving orders to his men to gather the dead and put the wounded out of their pain, he led the way towards the palace; and on the journey, with many looks in the direction of Cecil, he said something to the members of the great council which seemed to meet with general approval.

It was not long before the incidents and impressions of this day began to bear their fruit. As time wore on, the unbounded admiration and liking of Aleif for Cecil increased; and it was evident to the rest of us that we were only looked at in a sort of light reflected from my brother. Fortunately,

we were all pretty thick-skinned. The king, too, besides practically monopolising Cecil himself, took every opportunity of throwing him into the company of Sigrida; and I am bound to say that he resigned himself to the situation with much grace and meekness, and even pretended (so successfully, indeed, that the pretence was barely to be seen) to like it! And it was wonderful how, under the tuition of the princess, he improved in his knowledge of the language.

As may be imagined, our friend Eyvind was not blind to all this, and the sight of any one other than himself with Sigrida was apparently as gall and wormwood to him. I have a suspicion that he upbraided Sigrida, and very properly received a rebuff. At anyrate, he gradually became moody and silent, and altogether unlike himself, and many a time wandered off alone and was missing for hours. On one occasion I came upon him in this state, and could not resist asking what ailed him.

He turned on me quite fiercely.

'*Thou* askest me that!' he exclaimed, 'when it is to thee and thy brother that all my misery is due!' After a pause, more gently: 'But it is not thy blame, Godfrei; forgive me my foolish words.'

He looked so woe-begone and pathetic that, although I was almost laughing, I could not help feeling for him. Perhaps both of us felt a touch of the nature that makes the whole world kin.

'Thou needst not fear my brother, Eyvind, as a rival,' said I; 'nothing, I know, is further from his thoughts.'

'It is not that!' he cried. 'But if Sigrida's love is gone, dost thou think it matters to me whether or not thy brother loves *her*?'

And without giving me time to reply, he shook me off and went on his way.

A few days thereafter, or about a fortnight from the date of our arrival at Hjalnord, I happened to be with Sigrida alone in the room in which I had first seen her, which was

occupied by her and her father as a general sitting-room. I had entered in the hope of finding some of my comrades there, but, instead, I found only the princess. I was about to withdraw, when she motioned me to remain, and I did so.

For a little we spoke on ordinary topics, but I could not fail to see that she was absent and preoccupied, as if thinking of something else than that about which she was talking. Observing her closely, too, I noticed a deeper look in her eyes than I had seen before. At last, after glancing quickly at me once or twice in a way decidedly uncomfortable to one of my modest nature, she seemed to make up her mind to some resolve, and hurriedly said :

‘I know I can trust thee, Godfrei ; thy brother has told me that thou art both good and true, and indeed I can see it in thy face’—which at that moment, after such compliments, must have been rather red. ‘I wish thy advice, for I am in a sore strait. Thou must have seen the favour of my father the king for thy brother, but thou mayst not know that it is his purpose to keep him in this land if he can, and that he thinks the only way to do this is—to marry him to me. And that, believe me, is his intention.’

She paused, and I was so absolutely thunderstruck by this announcement that I could not open my mouth.

‘It is so,’ she earnestly continued, doubtless observing the incredulity expressed in my countenance. ‘And I dare not disobey my father, for his mind is set on this as it has seldom been on anything. But yet I cannot do it!’ she exclaimed, her voice breaking and her eyes filling with tears ; and I think I understood what she meant. By her tone alone she revealed more of her womanly sweetness than she could have done by volumes of words.

‘Godfrei,’ she went on, ‘I have told thee so much, and now I tell thee more, for I see that thou art my friend. I love Eyvind, and I think he once loved me ; but now, since ye strangers came’—again with a catch in her voice—‘it has

been different. Now he looks not at me. Canst thou find no means of telling him what I have said?—but no! thou must not—perhaps it is better thus!’

At this, somehow, I felt a little queer myself, and I don’t think I was ever more glad of anything than that it was within my power to reassure Sigrida.

‘If it be as thou sayest’—— I began.

But she interrupted.

‘I have said it is!’ she cried; ‘would it were not so!’

‘Then fear not,’ I said, and went on to tell her of the betrothed whom Cecil had left behind him in England, and that he, at least, would never be a party to the king’s plans. She began to brighten, and listened eagerly to the interesting particulars I gave her.

‘Be assured,’ I said, ‘that when the time comes the king will find out that he cannot shake our purpose. As for Eyvind, thou needst not be afraid of his constancy, for I know well in whose keeping his heart still is. Only allow me, and I shall soon prove to thee that it is so.’

No more was required; and I had the pleasure of knowing that at one stroke I had made two persons happy, or at least insured that eventually they should be happy. And yet—so inexplicable are the workings of that phenomenon we call human nature—I myself felt far from happy.

‘I thank thee, Godfrei,’ said Sigrida with a smile more eloquent than her words; ‘I am glad I spoke to thee, for thou hast been a good friend to me. Never shall I forget thee, nor what thou hast done;’ and she offered me her hand, which I respectfully kissed.

Then she rose, as if to leave.

‘Speak not to Eyvind,’ she commanded, laughingly, as the coquetry once more showed itself, ‘for he deserves a punishment for his want of faith.’

Next moment she was gone. And just then, had it not been for a memory of Eyvind’s woe-begone face, I should have fallen in love with her myself; and as it was—well, I called

myself a sentimental fool, and went off for an afternoon's shooting.

In the meantime, Dr Felix Lorimer and his assistants, in the persons of Clements, Wemyss, and Gates, had been industriously engaged in observations, investigations, and inquiries concerning the Pole and everything connected therewith. Naturally, the first thing to which they directed their attention was the tidal water below it, and many weary hours did they spend in the Law Rock observing its rise and fall. Perhaps the only practical discovery made was that the centre of the well was directly beneath the Pole, and that there might therefore be some connection between the two. But as there were no reliable data as to cause and effect, we had to content ourselves with conjecture; and the doctor got more satisfaction from his inquiries among the people in reference to climate, storms, and displays of the aurora borealis around the Pole. The results of these investigations, the value of which to science can scarcely be overestimated, will in time be given to the world by my learned friend in person.





CHAPTER XXIV.

A CIRCUMPOLAR CEREMONY.

SIGRIDA'S startling revelation of the designs of Aleif had the effect of making me keep my eyes open; and looked at in this new light, many things that I should have passed over before, now assumed some importance as going to confirm her story. One, for instance, could not help remarking the manner in which the king habitually threw his daughter and Cecil together. The members of the council, all of whom were obviously under his influence, also took their cue from him, and favoured Eyvind with few of the warm and friendly glances of former days. To us, on the contrary, they showed every favour. To our friend it must have been very suggestive.

A month passed, however, without any proposal from Aleif. During that time we did as we liked; and our fame having been spread abroad, we were everywhere treated with the greatest consideration. Cecil danced attendance on his majesty; Jansen and I hunted and fished to our hearts' content; and so did the others when they were not pursuing their scientific labours. In a word, we lived a sort of holiday existence.

But at last this came to an end. One July afternoon, as I was sitting in the quadrangle, in company with Wemyss, Egil appeared and summoned us to a meeting of the great council. Then I knew that the critical moment for which I had been waiting was at hand.

'Are the rest there?' I asked.

'Only thy brother, Nils, and Eyvind. I have yet to summon the others.'

As he mentioned Eyvind's name, I involuntarily whistled—the scene was little likely to be a peaceful one.

After the doctor and his companions, who were, as usual, on the top of the Pole (as in jest we always designated the Law Rock), had been signalled to descend, we repaired across the way to the council-house. Around a table, in a room somewhat more elaborately got up than the ordinary, were gathered the councillors, each of whom sat looking as if to smile were impossible, so solemn and important was the occasion. At the head was the king; and near the foot, seats for Eyvind and for us. When we were all present, Aleif commenced without the least preliminary:

'More than a moon has passed since the strangers from beyond the Utgard—from a wonderful land many days' journey across the great ice—arrived in Hjalnord, and ye have all seen the manner of men they are, and the marvellous powers that are theirs. And especially have ye seen he whom they call Cecil, who is as truly a man as ever I saw! I have bethought myself that if ever Hjalnord be threatened by enemies—as it has been before, and as it may be again, so long as there are unscrupulous chiefs in Islöken—the help that could be rendered unto me by the strangers is great, greater than any force *we* have. But as it may be that they care not to remain here as mere guests, I have my proposal to make, and it is this. My daughter, Sigrída, is now of an age to marry, and I ask ye if ye can find any bar to her union with the stranger they call Cecil?'

As he said this I heard a muttered exclamation from my side, and an instant later Eyvind jumped up, his face livid. Then, recollecting himself, he gave one look round, and hurried from the room.

'Ye have heard,' resumed Aleif, without taking the least notice of the interruption, 'the words I have spoken, and ye know my will. Now, as bound by the law, I leave the

proposal in your hands, for your sanction or for your condemnation.'

No doubt the councillors had been carefully prepared beforehand, for at once a loud shout arose and was repeated. It showed that whatever opposition there might be, it would not come from the great council.

'It is well,' said the king, as if highly pleased.

But I was not so sure of that. For one thing, as soon as Cecil caught the drift of the speech, he wished to refuse on the spot, and in as strong words as could be used; and it was with the greatest difficulty that we induced him to keep his seat, for to cross Aleif in his present mood would have been simple madness.

'Ye also have heard the proposal, and it is now before ye,' then said the king, turning to us, 'and on the morrow at this hour we shall meet here to receive the answer of Cecil.'

Taking this as a notice of dismissal, we bowed ourselves out, and right glad were we—or at least I was—to get into the open air again.

'What does it all mean?' asked Cecil, as we crossed to the palace.

'Just this,' said the doctor, quietly, 'that you're to marry your friend Sigrida on the shortest notice, and that unless you do so—well, we're in a hole!'

Cecil brought down his hand upon Lorimer's shoulder with such emphasis that for some time thereafter our learned physician took care to preserve a goodly distance between them.

'Look here, you fellows,' he said, with the utmost determination, expressed in both words and action; 'marry her who likes, I swear that Cecil Oliphant never shall.' It is not that I dislike her—for she's really a charming girl in every way—but most of you know, I suppose, that I'm otherwise engaged.'

Further discussion was stopped by a message from Eyvind,

delivered by one of his soldiers, to the effect that he desired to speak with us. Guessing his purpose, it may be supposed that our minds were not altogether easy as we followed the man into the quadrangle, in the middle of which his master was standing.

'I am glad ye have come, for now I can talk plainly,' he began; and though he spoke calmly, we could see that he was boiling with rage. 'On your arrival in this land I befriended ye; and now, as ye have just heard, one of ye requites me by robbing me of my bride! I know not if that be the custom in the land from which ye come, but it is not the custom in Islöken; and if it were not for the memory of our friendship, then we should see which of us was the better man. But ye have done your worst,' he concluded, grimly, 'and now ye can go on your way, and I shall go mine with the hope that we shall never meet again! I have spoken.'

And he turned to walk away. But, in spite of his words, I could not let him go in that spirit. Laying my hand on his arm, I stopped him.

'I shall not remind *thee* of the services we have done thee,' I said, 'but I shall of what I have already told thee—that Cecil never was, nor ever shall be, thy rival. Until within this hour he knew no more of Aleif's purpose than thou, and now he refuses even to consider his proposal. I leave it to thee, then, how far either of us has been unfaithful to our friendship. And now, Eyvind, *I* have spoken, and it remains for thee to say if we shall have thine aid in frustrating Aleif and changing his purpose.'

'And I say, Eyvind,' put in Cecil, heartily, 'that what my brother has said is true; and if you care to go in and win Sigrída—why, then, you have my blessing!'

Eyvind's anger vanished, and as Cecil concluded he drew away from us a little shamefacedly. 'I have wronged ye,' he admitted, honestly, 'and I ask thy forgiveness, Cecil, and thine, Godfrei. Odin knows that I was only too ready

to believe in the proverb that "women are as treacherous as young ice." Again I ask ye to forgive me for thinking that of ye also.'

We offered our hands, and as he shook them heartily the treaty of peace was ratified. That done to the gratification of all (for Eyvind was such a favourite that any breach with him would have been felt by each of us alike), we told him of our dilemma, and asked him if there was any way out of it.

'If there be a way, I see it not,' he said, after a moment's consideration. 'Aleif brooks no opposition, and to refuse him is certain death, in spite of his present liking for ye and all your powers. No, my friends'—a little sadly—'Cecil must accept; there is no alternative that I can see.'

'I don't say that,' cried the doctor, energetically. 'Where there's a will there's a way, and if we refuse, surely we can find some means of doing it in safety. Or couldn't we accept, and then take ourselves off before the marriage? for'—to us—'you know it's about time now to think of returning to the ship, if we don't want her to sail for England without us.'

Eyvind shook his head.

'Tis almost impossible,' he replied. 'If Cecil consents, the betrothment takes place at once, and the marriage as soon after as the king pleases. And it is certain that Aleif will never allow ye to leave until all is settled.'

As, in the face of this declaration, we realised the uncompromising nature of the situation, we began to feel a little uncomfortable. There was a few minutes' silence; and then, as luck would have it, who should appear at the other end of the court but Sigrida herself?

'Just the thing!' ejaculated the doctor. 'Woman's wit may find a way out of this that we should never have thought of. Let Cecil and Eyvind, as the two most concerned, consult Sigrida; and I shall be surprised if she doesn't settle the matter in a trice.'

Eyvind drew back, and his face flushed a little as he said: 'Twill be better for Cecil to go alone; for I cannot do it.'

'Why not?' asked Lorimer, a trifle impatiently.

But I remembered the chief's own words that if her love for *him* had gone, it mattered not who loved her; and, divining the cause of his hesitation, I thought myself justified in telling him, as shortly as I could, the substance of my talk with the young lady. It was pleasant to see how the light came back into his eyes and the colour into his face.

'Thanks, Godfrei: now I shall go!' he exclaimed. 'And come thou, too; we may need thee to remind Sigrída of her own words.'

I consented, and together we crossed the court towards the princess, leaving the rest to discuss the affair amongst themselves. Sigrída appeared surprised to see the three of us, and by her grave look I thought that she also had heard the news. When she spoke, it was evident I was right.

'Ye have been with the council?' she inquired, with a strange side-glance towards Eyvind, as if to find out how he had taken it.

And before either Cecil or I could reply, the chief of Hjetla had commenced to speak in the Icelandic tongue, and so rapidly that we could not follow him. But Sigrída, we saw, blushed deeply as our friend went on, and from that, as well as from his pleading gestures, we could guess the purport of his address. At last he finished, and Sigrída answered him with only a word; but that, and the message from her eyes that accompanied it, sent the blood rushing to his face. It was with difficulty that he restrained the ecstasy within him.

In a minute both had collected themselves, and Sigrída turned towards us.

'Eyvind has told me,' she said, with a little laugh, 'that thou, Cecil, carest not for a marriage between thee and the

daughter of the king. It is strange; and yet, if thou hast a betrothed in thine own land, I blame thee not. But I see not how we can prevent it, for my father is set upon it, and nothing, I know, can turn him from his purpose.'

'That may be so, but he may rest assured that the offer of his kingdom won't induce me to marry thee!' emphatically said Cecil; and then, seeing from Sigrida's rather indignant look that he had put the truth somewhat harshly, he diplomatically added: 'For I know that I should thus offend both thee and my friend Eyvind.'

'And that being the case,' I hastened to say, 'canst thou not in any way free thyself and Cecil?'

'Give me a moment to think,' she replied.

We watched her with much eagerness, and when, after some puckering up of her brow and other signs of hard thought she brightened, we did likewise, in the hope that she had discovered a loophole of escape.

'Cecil must consent, and allow the betrothment to take place,' she said; and when my brother and Eyvind would have spoken, she motioned them to keep silent. 'In no other way can my father be gratified, and thus put off his guard. Thereafter, if I succeed in postponing the marriage for a time, ye must flee, as Eyvind says ye wish to do. I have a plan. I know that in the autumn, when the harvest is over, the king proposes to visit the various countries of Islöken; and I think, to please Eyvind, he may be induced to consent to the marriage taking place when he visits Hjetla. When he arrives he must find ye gone. But that may be considered again; as it is, I have no other plan. What dost thou say to it, Cecil?'

Cecil looked doubtful, and said nothing. Clearly he did not like the idea of it. Sigrida saw this.

'If I am willing to take the risk, so, surely, art thou,' she said, proudly. 'If ye fail to escape, the blow will fall as heavily upon me as upon thee.'

Cecil gave in. Eyvind was more refractory; but he, too,

was pacified by a few words from the princess. As for myself, I confess that I never admired a woman more than at that moment I admired Sigrida.

‘But if the plan is to be successful,’ she went on, ‘it must be carried through with heart and soul, that no suspicions may arise. Thou, Eyvind’—laughingly—‘must no longer be glum and discontented, else the king may not allow the strangers to return to Hjetla. Thou Cecil, must give thy consent to-morrow, and then the betrothment will take place. After that, let us hope that all will be well.’

She bowed and disappeared through one of the side-courts, just as the king entered at the other end. Eyvind acted his part well. To his majesty he apologised for his interruption in the council-house, which he excused on the ground of astonishment, and trusted that Cecil would amply justify the choice of the king. The latter, quite unsuspecting, cordially shook hands with him; and there the matter rested, to the present satisfaction of all parties concerned.

Everything befell exactly as Sigrida had foretold. Next day Cecil gave his formal answer to the great council, and by Aleif, who ‘carried on’ as if the delight had unhinged his brain, the betrothal was fixed for the Sunday following.

‘Any day will do equally well,’ observed the doctor, sardonically. ‘If that girl plays us false, I’m afraid there’s nothing for it, Cecil, but to marry her. If not, I shall be inclined to say you’ve lost a perfect treasure.’

Like all necessary ceremonies in the Paradise of the North, the betrothal was a simple affair. But, although simple, it was not held less sacred by the natives. Cecil became rather alarmed when Eyvind told him that it was regarded as a mere preliminary to marriage, and that there was no breaking of the tie, unless by death or a special dispensation of the great council. If either party died before the final consummation, the survivor became the possessor of all the other’s property, just as if they had been really married.

Hjalnord was usually a quiet place, but on the eventful

morning it rapidly became thronged by the incoming of hundreds of the surrounding peasantry, who had heard of the forthcoming ceremony, and knowing Aleif's hospitable nature, doubtless anticipated a sumptuous feast to all and sundry. If so, they were not disappointed, for an open table was kept in front of the council-house, and of the king's ale there was literally an unlimited supply.

Exactly at noon, two processions issued from the palace, and by different routes made their way to the Law Rock, on which, as required by the law, the betrothal was to take place. In the first was Sigrída (who was closely veiled), her father, and the members of the great council, attended by a portion of the army of Hjalnord; and in the other Cecil and the rest of us, with Eyvind and his men. As we crossed the open space to the rock, we were warmly cheered by the crowd.

Owing to the narrowness of the paths, it was some time before the whole company had assembled on the summit. The king took his seat upon the knoll—otherwise the North Pole, as the reader knows—having on his right his own party, and on his left the prospective bridegroom's. The council and others stood around in a circle; behind them were the soldiers; and away down below, at the foot of the mount, were his majesty's loyal subjects in general.

'Did you ever in your wildest flights of fancy imagine,' whispered the doctor to me, 'that one day you should be an actor in a betrothal held around the Pole?'

A prayer to Odin from the senior councillor present commenced the proceedings. At the king's request Sigrída stepped forward a little, Cecil did the same, and in Icelandic a long exhortation was addressed to them, of which the latter fortunately did not understand a word. Then, through the doctor as interpreter, Cecil was asked:

'If Odin wills, and there be nothing of a nature to prevent it, shalt thou, Cecil, at a time appointed, marry Sigrída, the daughter of Aleif, the king of Islöken?'

'If there be nothing to prevent it—I will,' replied Cecil, quietly.

'And thou, Sigrida, shalt thou marry Cecil?'

She returned the same answer.

'Then thus do I bind ye,' said Aleif, stepping down from the knoll and joining Cecil's right hand with Sigrida's left, emblematical of the fact, I suppose, that they were not yet fully united.

Thereafter two garlands of wild-flowers were wreathed round their heads, and, perhaps under the same idea, left untied at one end. All those of chieftain's rank having shaken hands with the now betrothed couple, Aleif delivered another address, at the end of which a ringing cheer was given by those on the hill and around it; and with a concluding prayer the ceremony, to our great relief, came to an end.

Sigrida, who had borne up all through with courageous firmness, slipped away under the wing of a friendly councillor as soon as she could; but from the summit we saw that she got a tremendous ovation as she passed through the people on her way to the palace. It was obvious that she was a great favourite with the commonalty.

As for Cecil, he had to go through the ordeal of receiving congratulations from chief and peasant alike. The king, with ludicrous pride, would insist on presenting him to every one as a sort of demi-god, and it was perhaps as well for him that his ignorance again served him in good stead.

'Marvellous powers!' the old sinner would repeat. "'Fresh blood renews the stock," says the proverb'—he was great in proverbs—'and we in Hjalnord have long had need of fresh blood. Odin be praised that at last we have got it!'

And by way of praising Odin and at the same time celebrating the auspicious occasion, he gave that evening a magnificent feast to over a hundred guests. When I say that it began at seven and ended at four the next morning, I may leave the rest to imagination.

Cecil, of course, occupied his official position at the king's right hand, and managed very successfully to hoodwink him in the way he had done before.

'My son, thou art a man!' he said more than once during the evening, as his potations began to take effect, 'and when thou art in reality my son, we shall together regain the ancient glory of my crown, and be in reality what we are—or at least *I* am—only in name.'

There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. He might not have been so sanguine had he known what was passing in our heads, and been aware of the little plan that was ready for execution; or we, had we known what the morrow was to bring forth.





CHAPTER XXV.

THE WRATH OF THE FIRE-SPIRIT.

IT was about noon on the following day. Hjalnord, usually so quiet, had an unwonted appearance of bustle; for, assembled in the principal street, was a large crowd surrounding several chariots and a company of strange soldiers, and the excitement was even spreading to the smaller and less-used thoroughfares. When Cecil and I came upon the scene, we could not at first make out the cause of the uproar; and it was not until the warriors had cleared a way to the palace gate, and we saw a man descending from one of the chariots, that we began to share the popular feeling. For the man was Orná of Reyðverá; and with ready wit the people, having doubtless heard all about our connection with him, had foreseen the complications likely to ensue.

As Orná advanced to the gate, where Egil stood ready to welcome him in the name of the king, he recognised us, and greeted us with the most distant of bows, which we returned in kind. Then he disappeared inside, and we looked at each other.

‘A new entanglement!’ said Cecil, with a whistle. ‘I only hope it doesn’t interfere with *our* plan. But let us see what Eyvind thinks of it.’

Eyvind was walking in the garden with one of the councillors, but as soon as he saw us he left his companion and came towards us.

‘Good news!’ he gleefully exclaimed, before we could open our mouths. ‘I have just heard from Sigrída that the

king is not averse to our proposal, and that, if I speak at once, he is sure to agree.'

He was so elated that it was with a pang we had to throw cold water over his anticipations by telling him of Orná's arrival.

'Orná!—impossible!' he cried. 'Thou art right—it bodes no good to us. If his false tongue be once loosened, it is difficult to say the effect it may have on Aleif. So it behoves us, my friends, to see him this moment, ere Orná can exert his influence!'

The first steps to this end were immediately taken, but to the chief's chagrin it was found that Orná was already with the king. Could he affect our position in any way? we could not help asking ourselves, and we had to confess that the chances in our favour were much lessened. It was not until evening that Eyvind had an opportunity of seeing Aleif, and while he was preferring his claim we awaited him in our room, with what anxiety may be imagined. He was not long absent, and on his return his gloomy face told its own story.

'The king refuses to allow ye to leave until after the wedding,' he said simply.

'Refuses!' repeated Cecil in a tone of consternation.

'It is true. He has no objection to the marriage taking place in Hjetla, but he insists that until that time all of ye must stay with him. I reminded him that I was thy first host, Cecil, and had therefore some claim to thee. For a moment he seemed to waver. But Orná—may Loki blast him!—was present, and by a whispered word made the king suspicious, so that again he refused me. What he hath said I know not, but it has been more than sufficient, and Aleif cannot be moved—his purpose is strong and unchangeable.'

'Then what is to be done?' I asked.

The chief's eyes kindled, but for a moment he did not reply. Then his words poured forth quickly and impetuously.

'There is only one thing that can now be done,' he said. 'The time for speech is past; we must have deeds—ay, and bold deeds! My friends, we must march away without asking the permission of Aleif, and, if need be, cut our way through all Islöken to Hjetla.'

His enthusiasm almost carried us away.

'But,' I pointed out, 'Aleif could surround thy men with six times their number, and then there are Orná's also. Is it not a little too foolhardy?'

'Listen. To-morrow night there is to be a feast in Orná's honour, and on the following morn Aleif, as is his wont, will rise not until mid-day. We must be ready and steal away early, before any one can know of our going. Everything may be arranged; the chariots awaiting us without the town, my men warned beforehand and assembled at the appointed time, and, if possible, all in Hjalnord thrown off their guard. Even if our flight be immediately discovered, it will be long before the king can be awakened and the soldiers gathered. If we get clear off, we shall never be overtaken, for the moment we pass out of Aleif's own district we shall, I trust, be amongst friends. If we are, we must fight—and, as ye know, the men of Hjetla *can* fight. The risk, my friends, is a small one—so small that the most prudent need not fear to take it.'

We were half-convinced, doubtless because we wished to be so convinced. And the idea was really a plausible one. But the doctor started a difficulty.

'But about thyself, Eyvind, and Sigrída,' he said: 'will not this hopelessly compromise thee with Aleif?'

'Is it not better thus than to lose her altogether, as I must otherwise do?' he demanded. 'And something is also due to ye. But listen again. If Aleif declares war against me, it shall be on his own head; for Orná being with him, and being but badly liked by all, I shall have many friends on my side—mayhap more than he. And to-day I shall send a messenger to my brother at Hjetla, that he may collect all

our forces, to be ready for my arrival. Once ye have left the country I shall soon make friends with Aleif—he cannot afford to despise my offers—and then the rest may be left to Sigrída. Doubt not that in the end all shall come right; my destiny is written in the stars, and it is to become master of all Islöken!’

He spoke so confidently that to oppose him would have been pure folly. We had no counter-proposal; for the sake, not only of Cecil, but also of Sigrída and Eyvind, we could not remain in Hjalnord; and if his plan was more or less risky, there are few things in this world that are not. By his own showing, the chances were ten to one in its favour; and it being clearly the only alternative to staying and doing Aleif’s will, we accepted.

‘Be it so, Eyvind!’ I said. ‘Depend upon it thou shalt have our best help in carrying it out.’

He grasped my hand warmly. ‘It *shall* succeed!’ he cried. ‘And now I go to inform Sigrída, and to despatch the messenger to Hjetla!’

Sigrída, to whom the news of Aleif’s refusal had come as a disagreeable shock, warmly approved of the project, and all the following day Eyvind was busy with his preparations. As for us, all we could do was to appear as usual, and be civil to Aleif and Orná. The men were ordered to take as much sleep as they could that day, and at five the next morning to creep away one by one and assemble at a distance from the palace. The reindeer and chariots, under the charge of some of them, were under some pretence driven to a point outside the city. In a word, by the time of the feast everything was in order for our dash for liberty. Even fate seemed to favour us. That night both the king and Orná imbibed even more freely than usual, and at three o’clock, when the carouse came to an end, were almost too far gone to speak.

‘Strangers, ye have—ugh!—taken too much ale!’ said the former, as he was carried off to bed, in the way of those in his

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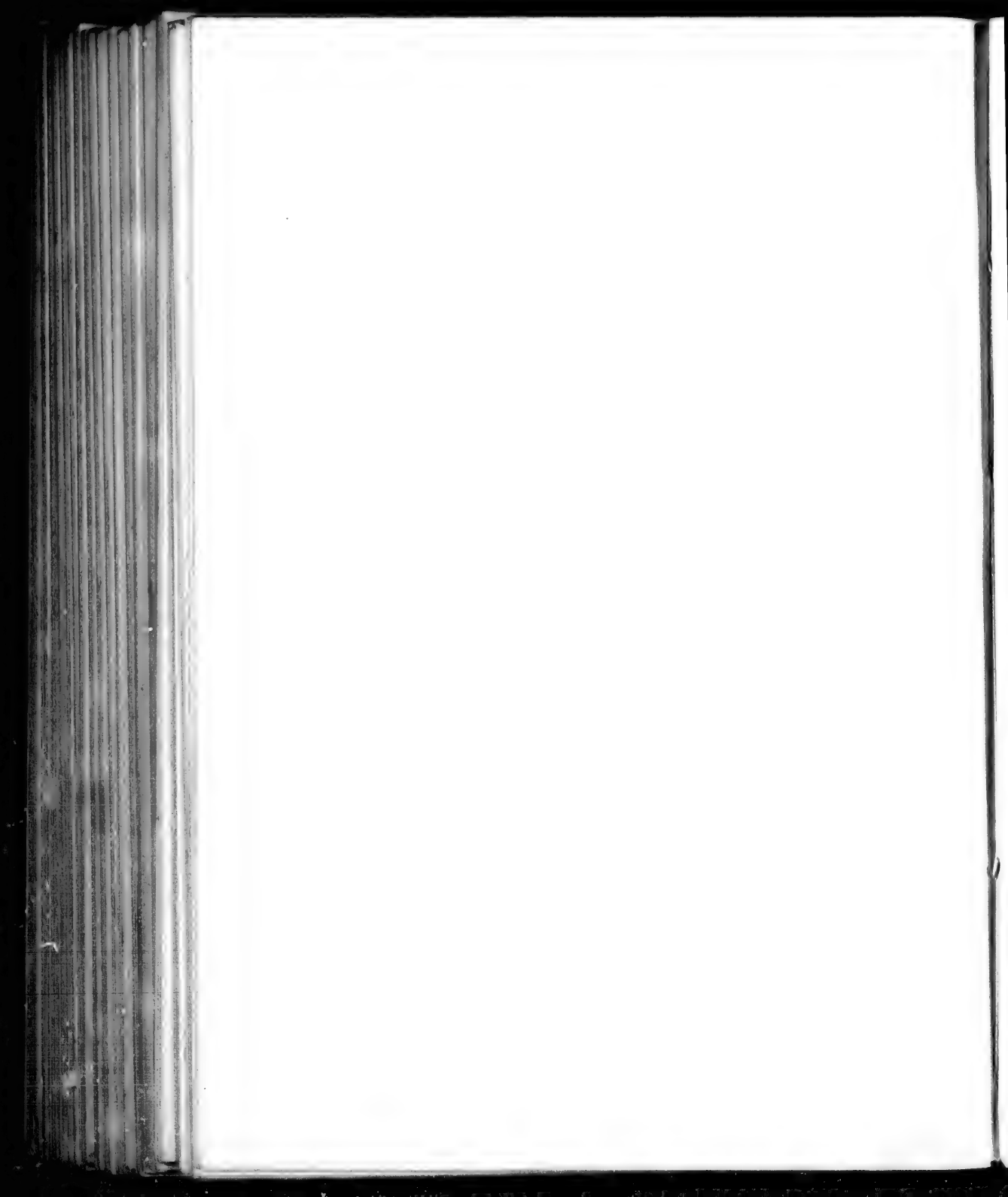
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We were about to depart, after a last look around us, when through the vapour we saw a figure in white advancing towards us. It was Sigrida.



condition ; I shall—ugh !—have to see to it to-morrow—ugh !
ugh !

These were the last words of his we heard, and that was the last time we saw him.

Two hours thereafter, each laden with his most valuable luggage, we crept from our rooms like silent spectres, and met in a corner of the court. In that land of the midnight sun, we could not have had a better morning for our purpose, for everything was covered and hidden by a light but impenetrable mist. We were about to depart, after a last look around us, when through the vapour we saw a figure in white advancing towards us. It was Sigrida.

‘Eyvind—Godfrei—Cecil—my friends,’ she said, softly, ‘I could not have ye depart without saying farewell, for ye have served me as few would have done. I am grateful. I shall never forget ye. Be happy in your own land, and think sometimes of Hjalnord and Sigrida. Farewell !’

She shook hands with us all ; and as we turned away there was a suspicious lump in the throats of more than one. I know there was in mine. For a minute Eyvind lingered behind, and then, without a word, he rejoined us. Together we passed through a side-door into the street—we were free. And yet, as I turned my back on the palace of the king in all probability for ever, I felt as though my heart had been turned into a lump of ice. Well—so be it !

The soldiers were at the appointed spot, and—evidence of their love for their chief and of the high state of discipline to which he had brought them—not one was missing from his place.

‘The gate !’ suddenly cried Eyvind, as we began to move. ‘I forgot that it is shut, and guarded by several soldiers. We must surprise them. Men, be ready !’

He issued a few rapid orders, and slowly and carefully we crept nearer and nearer the gate. In a little it loomed through the mist quite near to us. We halted ; all was quiet. Then Eyvind and several picked men glided away, while the rest

of us waited in suspense. At length we saw the gate gradually opening, and the chief returned and reported all well; cautiously we resumed our march; and as we came opposite the gate, he pointed out about half-a-dozen soldiers soundly asleep in a small guardhouse which stood there.

‘Disturb them not!’ he said. ‘But for their carelessness we might have had a more difficult task. And when on awakening they find the gate open’—for, as it could be shut only from the inside, we were obliged to leave it thus—‘be sure that to save their own skins they will close it again, and swear that it was never open!’

In a few minutes we were out of sight of it altogether, and soon after we reached the place at which the chariots were awaiting us. Needless to say, we hurried on as if an army of goblins were at our heels.

About nine, when the fog began to lift, we saw that we were quite close to the hills from which we had first seen Hjalnord, but were approaching them at an entirely different point. Then, as may be remembered, we were forced by a volcanic eruption to take a roundabout way; but now, the road having been repaired, we were going direct. As yet no signs of pursuit. We passed many people, of course, but I suppose they had no reason to regard us with much suspicion. At any-rate, it was not until, an hour or two later, we had reached the base of the hills that Eyvind abruptly stopped, and stood intently listening.

‘The alarm at last!’ he exclaimed. ‘But we have had five hours’ start. On! on!’

The fog had completely cleared away, and borne on a faint breeze from the Pole came the sound of many alarm-bells, that to Eyvind’s sharp ears had told its own story. On! on! with all speed. But the ascent was steep and the road rough, and our progress proportionately slow. Just as we had come within sight of the summit, Cecil espied some one away down below, following us with the utmost speed that he could flog out of the six reindeer drawing his chariot. Nearer and

nearer ; we saw nothing of any one save the solitary chariot-
eer ; and then, at length, we made him out to be Egil, the
herald of the king. Before long he had overtaken our
rearguard, and halting, we drew up to receive him.

‘From Aleif the ‘king!’ he shouted, as he leaped down, hot
and breathless from his exertions. ‘He demands the reason
of this, and your immediate return to Hjalnord.’

‘Carry my answer to thy master,’ said Cecil, taking it upon
him to reply. ‘Tell him that I decline an alliance with his
daughter ; that I, and those with me, refuse his demand, and
dare him to compel us. He knows our powers, and he has our
warning!’

‘Good, Cecil!’ approvingly cried Eyvind—adding, mock-
ingly, ‘And tell him from me, Egil, that the strangers return
with me to Hjetla, and that there, if he please, they shall
again be glad to see him.’

‘That is thy answer?’ inquired the herald

‘Thou hast it.’

‘It is well. Farewell, until we meet again—it may not be
long!’ And, seating himself in his carriage, he plied the
whip so vigorously that soon he was but a rapidly-vanishing
speck on the great plain of Hjalnord.

Then on again. In a few minutes more we had taken our
last look at the capital of the north—at the plain, cultivated
like a garden, at the wheel-shaped city, at the great snowy
mountains beyond, and, finally, at the visible representation of
that point which we alone of all Europe had reached—the
North Pole.

‘We may never see it again,’ said the doctor, with a sigh ;
‘but it’s some consolation that the honour of having settled
the long-disputed question can never be taken from us.’

On! on! We did not camp until we had covered forty
miles, and were beyond the borders of Hjalnord, but pushed
on steadily and swiftly, that we might not lose the advantage
we had gained. The next day was the same, and the next.
The endurance of the men was wonderful ; though our march

was over the rockiest ground, they never complained or seemed tired, but, on the contrary, they were always anxious to dash on and on still faster. Now and again, as we passed a village, we exchanged our deer, for the animals, strangely enough, held out much less bravely than the men. And at last, thinking ourselves comparatively safe, we settled down to a more moderate speed.

On the morning of the fourth day, however, we received intelligence that came to us as a thunderbolt from the blue. On the preceding afternoon we had passed through the town of a friendly chief, and early this morning a messenger arrived from him with the startling news that the whole army of the king was only a few hours' march behind us. Not only that, but Orná had started to take us in flank, and cut off our retreat in case we should flee from the royal battalion.

'Orná's hand is in this,' said Eyvind, 'for Aleif could never have conceived it. My friends, we shall have to fight'—in a tone that made me suspect he was by no means averse from such a thing, even against big odds—'and in a manner that we may first defeat the king, and then Orná.'

'One by one, like Napoleon,' suggested the doctor.

'I know him not—is he one of your gods?' ('Only a demi-god,' said Cecil.) 'But we cannot fight here; we must push on to a position more favourable to us, and there await the enemy.'

But pushing on, that day, was no easy matter. It was as if some great atmospheric change was impending; the air, without being absolutely hot, was terribly oppressive, and seemed charged with electricity; and the sky was a dull, leaden-white colour, tinged in some parts with red. Every mile or two, owing to the utter exhaustion of all, a halt had to be called; and when, early in the afternoon, we came to a broad river ten miles farther on, it was impossible to advance another step.

'We need not,' said Eyvind, 'for on the opposite side we shall do battle with Aleif's forces.'

Crossing by a ford that at its deepest reached to our chests, we took up our position on the summit of a gentle slope that, for a thousand yards or so, rose from the bank. It was Eyvind's purpose to allow the greater part of the enemy to cross, and then rush down and scatter them before they had time to form. Meanwhile, we threw ourselves on the ground and endeavoured—in vain—to snatch a few minutes' sleep.

In the course of two hours Aleif's vanguard came in sight, and by its disorganised appearance, and the weary way in which the men dragged themselves forward, we could see that they also were affected by the stifling air. Soon there was only the river between us and the whole force—in all some twelve hundred warriors, or twelve times our number. But in spite of this they seemed in no hurry to come to closer quarters. Eyvind, on his part, was ready, and we were eager; but it was not until a considerable time had elapsed that by their movements towards the ford we made out that they had finally made up their minds. On they came, and the leading soldiers had entered the water; all on our side were intently watching them; when suddenly we saw signs of commotion in their midst, they fell back, and all at once we noticed that it was rapidly becoming darker.

'Look up!' exclaimed Wemyss; 'the whole sky's getting as black as pitch!'

It was true: on every side great black clouds were covering the heavens, gradually extinguishing the light of day. Already the first shadow had fallen. Every moment the darkness increased in density; distant objects became invisible, near ones grew dimmer and more indistinct. For a minute there was a deep and unbroken silence, as every one strove to imagine what was to come; and then a sound that told even us, unused to such phenomena, that which to expect.

'An upheaval!' cried Eyvind. 'Again Loki tries to escape, and the earth trembles. Keep close together, my friends, and look each to hims 'f!'

Even as he spoke, we felt the ground shake beneath our feet, at first gently, then violently and yet more violently ; at the same time the water in the river rose as if impelled by some irresistible force below, and rushed half-way up the slope towards us ; and the darkness grew more intense with every successive minute. There was a cry or two from our men and from Aleif's. Another shock, and the crash of falling rocks ; a third, and we were thrown to the earth ; and as we recovered, still another that again dashed us down, bruised and stunned. Now the darkness had, as it were, settled down, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that we could make out the agitated river below us. The air was filled with strange noises ; the solid land rose and fell like the waves of the ocean ; and with each upheaval down we went, until our heads swam and we bled from a score of wounds. So it continued, and in the power of the mighty Fire-Spirit we were as helpless as the brute beasts.

So far we had managed to keep well together. But at last there was a shock greater than any of its predecessors, followed by a long cry from the other side that told of damage done there, and by a queer, eerie sound as of the *tearing* asunder of the earth's surface. I was thrown down, and for a little was unable to rise. When I did so, I could distinguish nobody near me, and again falling, I rolled a short distance down the slope. I picked myself up and staggered forward, shouting loudly ; and at length I heard an answering cry, coming from what seemed to me a great distance. I ran in that direction, leaping by the way a small crevice that more than anything else brought home to me our position ; and in less than a minute I was by the side of my brother Cecil.

'This way, Godfrey !' he shouted. 'There's a big crack somewhere about—the rest are on the other side. Be ready to jump !'

Following him, I immediately found myself before a huge fissure. I was too much confused to be able to estimate the breadth ; but with all the force at my command I jumped,

and landed safely on the top of one of the soldiers, thus in a manner breaking my fall at the poor fellow's expense.

'Back! back!' some one ordered; and we retreated only in time, as the fissure widened to an enormous extent. Simultaneously the opposite bank of it disappeared altogether from our sight, doubtless as the effect of a subsidence. What ensued we only observed as in a glass darkly—and very darkly. There was a roar as of rushing waters; we felt the spray dash in our faces, and before we knew of it the river was rolling at our feet. But we did not stop to consider the startling change. In something approaching a panic, we stumbled on through the darkness in search of a safer refuge, now pulling up just on the brink of a crevasse, and the next moment being thrown down by a renewal of the earthquake. When we did halt, it was from the sheer consciousness that it was all one whether we stayed where we were or pushed on blindfold.

For nearly six hours the terrible convulsion continued unabated, but for the greater part of that time the majority of us were in a state of semi-insensibility, and really oblivious of that which was passing. When I came thoroughly to myself (and I was one of the first to do so), it was altogether at an end, and the sun was again shining brightly. But on what a different scene! The river had entirely changed its course, and now flowed seven or eight hundred yards to the left of its former bed. The configuration of the ground was completely altered; in every direction it was intersected by cracks and fissures, and huge masses of rock lay hither and thither. Where formerly was regularity, now was chaos; and where before was fertility, was now awful ruin.

'Once more has Loki done his work well!' said a voice by my side; and, turning, I greeted Eyvind. 'But to us at least he has done a service, for we need no longer fear an attack from our friends yonder'—pointing across the water to the king's warriors, who, like us, were visibly recovering from their trance.

‘How?’ demanded Lorimer, who had also joined us.

‘Because the ford is swept away, and before they have discovered another we shall, without doubt, have reached the vale of Hjetla. But the journey will be a rough one, for the earth-trembling must have destroyed the roads, and many hamlets and villages, too. Seldom have I seen a greater one—there will be many black hearts in Islöken to-day!’

‘Thou art right,’ said the doctor; ‘and we may thank our stars for our marvellous escape. Why, even science dwindles into nothing before such an exhibition of Nature’s great and hidden powers!’

Our escape was indeed a marvellous one, for two men only were missing, and about thirty more or less severely injured. As soon as these had been attended to, we turned our backs on the ill-fated spot and resumed our homeward march, looking as woe-begone a company as it has ever been my lot to see.





CHAPTER XXVI.

OUR DASH FOR LIBERTY.



IN as few words as possible I must hurry over the essential particulars that remain to be told of our doings in the Paradise of the North.

As Eyvind had prophesied, our journey to Hjetla was a most rough and fatiguing one. But at last, in spite of the universal desolation within the belt of the destructive earthquake, and the consequent difficulty of procuring supplies, we reached the vale, to find that by good fortune it had suffered less than the surrounding districts, only a small corner of it having been laid waste. Of the pursuing enemy and of Orná we saw no more. In compliance with our friend's order, all his available forces had been assembled in readiness—numbering altogether some fifteen hundred men, in the best condition, and eager for an aggressive war.

‘But neither the king nor Orná is likely to attack me,’ said the chief, ‘for many lives must have been lost, and for the present they will be otherwise occupied. Still, it behoves us to take measures to insure our safety both now and in the future.’

This he did with characteristic promptitude. Spies were sent into Reyðverá and to the north, scouts posted in every direction, and envoys despatched to such of the neighbouring chiefs as were likely to be friendly. In a day or two all was in readiness; and when, in the course of a short time, he got various promises of help, he declared himself prepared to defy any power that Aleif and Orná combined could bring against him.

He had not long to wait. On the return of one of the spies, we learned that the town of Orn had been utterly destroyed by the earthquake, that Orná had arrived, and that he was now collecting his men for an attack on Hjetla. Furthermore, that he had roused the fury of the people to the utmost by the declaration (in which it was almost impossible that he himself could believe) that to us the convulsion was due. The credulous populace, only too willing to credit the statement, were deeply incensed; a war to the death against us had been proclaimed; and that they meant to lose no time in carrying it out was soon evident. Only the next day, several of the scouts came in with the information that Orná was advancing with fourteen hundred men, and had already, as on a former occasion, seized the little canal. At that point he encamped, as if to await a promised reinforcement.

While Eyvind was completing his preparations for defence, the situation was complicated by the arrival of Egil with a message to the effect that the king was marching upon Hjetla with his army, and that, unless the strangers were instantly given up, he would deliver over the vale to fire and sword. But if they were, a free pardon would be the chief's reward, and a return to the favour of his gracious monarch.

'The king is but two days' journey distant,' supplemented the herald, 'and will attack thee, if his demand be not satisfied, the moment he effects a junction with Orná. If I may advise thee, I say, give up the strangers, for in no other way can there be peace. Be assured that they will be well treated, according to their deserts and the justice of the king.'

As Egil spoke Eyvind smiled grimly, and looked significantly towards us. 'Thou shalt have thine answer soon,' was, however, all he said. The herald withdrew.

Meanwhile, we 'strangers' held a whispered consultation, and decided that now was the time for laying before the chief a resolution previously come to amongst ourselves, in reference to our departure from Islöken.

'This is serious news,' I began, 'for to thee a battle against Aleif and Orná combined cannot be a matter of confidence and assurance. We, and we alone, are responsible; and so it is only our duty to relieve thee if we can. It seems that the king's hostility is merely towards us, and that thou hast little part in it. Is it not so?'

'It is, indeed,' he replied.

'And if we were gone he would have little ground against thee?'

'That is so.'

'Then,' I continued, quickly, 'we may yet balk our enemies and thine, and render thee a last service in return for thy many acts of kindness. Clements has this plan—to get ready the "iron magic boat" at once, and dash through the lakes and away, so that we shall never be overtaken! In this manner, my friend, it shall be as thou sayest, and when Aleif and Orná come they shall again be disappointed. What thinkest thou?'

For a few minutes Eyvind did not reply; and while he paced up and down the room in deep thought, we, to whom Clements' idea offered the only practical suggestion of getting clear away without further trouble, watched him in some anxiety. At last he spoke.

'It was in my head, my friends,' he said, 'that in the great fight to come ye would stand by my side, and help to gain for me the throne of my fathers; and that when it was over, and I sat at Hjalnord, ye snare with me the honours of our prowess. But—a little sadly and reproachfully—"it is not so to be: ye would leave the land and me, your friend; and I should never see ye more! If it be your will, it is good. I can say no more than to bid ye farewell.'

Having no reason to expect that he would receive our proposal in this way, we were rather taken aback. But as he turned to leave I stopped him.

'Eyvind,' said I, 'dost thou remember not the plan we made at Hjalnord, and thine own words that when we left

the land all would yet be well with thee? Be sure that it is for thy good alone that we go; were it not so, or wert thou in danger, dost think that we should not stay and fight beside thee? But we have thine own word. Yet it rests with thee. If thou sayest that the king and Orná will attack thee even if we go, then we shall stay and aid thee. It is for thee to decide.'

Again he deliberated, and when he answered, it was in a different tone.

'Thou art right, Godfrei: we must part, though my heart is heavy at the thought of it. Doubt not that in the future I shall often think of the deeds we have done together since ye entered this land; and often, too, in the days to come, shall I wish for your aid in time of need, when the battle may go sore against Eyvind of Hjetla. And I shall wish in vain! But it must be, for in your flight, in truth, lies the only hope for all of us. Words are little when the heart is full: I have finished. And now, Godfrei, I should like to hear again of thy plan.'

In a few words I indicated our intention—to make a dash for the sea *via* Reyðverá and Oliphant Inlet, and trust to the launch's speed and to the surprise of the natives to get through in safety.

'But there is one doubtful point,' I said, 'and it is the only one. Orná holds the little canal between the two lakes, and it is within his power to stop us there. Unless thou hast some plan, Eyvind, I'm afraid we must wait until he has advanced this way, and then take our chance.'

'I have it!' exclaimed the chief, without the least hesitation. 'This moment I shall send a body of my best men under my brother Hreidmar, and while Orná sleeps they shall post themselves around his camp. The ground is rocky, and will hide them well. Ye must start early, and when Hreidmar sees ye coming he shall fall on the sleeping men of Reyðverá and sweep them back from the canal. Then ye may pass while Orná yet rubs his eyes; and thereafter

my men shall disappear as suddenly as they came. It is good !'

The project had certainly the merits of ingenuity and audacity, but it was none the less likely to succeed. It was, at anyrate, worth trying.

'But will it not embroil thee still further with Orná?' the doctor asked.

'What matters it?' was the easy reply. 'If he does not put it down to the strangers' magic, as is most likely, he can do me no further harm; and be sure that the king cares too little for him to engage in an unpopular war on his behalf.'

And so, in the end, it was settled. The preparations for our departure were begun immediately, with the despatch of five hundred picked warriors under Hreidmar, who had full orders what to do and what not to do. This was in the early evening; and, to give them plenty of time, we were to start at two on the following morning. The launch, which was in splendid order, was got ready; all our belongings and the doctor's many specimen-boxes placed on board; arms and ammunition prepared in case of an emergency; and everything, in a word, put in order for our attempt. There was a farewell supper, and at its conclusion I presented Eyvind with one of the rifles (which, by the way, he had learned to use during our visit to the Pole), and also as many cartridges as we could spare. By the glitter in his eyes as he received the weapon, we could see that he appreciated the immense possibilities open to him as the apostolic successor, so to speak, of the magicians from beyond the *Utgard*.

'I thank thee,' he said, in grateful terms; 'and while I possess this magic tube I shall never forget thee and the others of my friends, nor allow my enemies to forget me! Never had king in Islöken a sceptre of such power!'

Early as was the hour of starting, there was quite a crowd assembled. To do us honour, Eyvind had mustered nearly a thousand of his armed tribesmen, who lined the

way from the house to the boat, and saluted as we passed. Steam was up; and as we took leave of the councillors, and stepped on board, the people heartily cheered us. Then, each in turn, we took leave of the chief. It was really affecting to see the way in which he wrung the hands of each again and again, and especially of Cecil and me, as if loath to let us go. But at length he gave us a final embrace, looked at us intently as if to impress our features upon his memory, and then abruptly turned and leaped on shore. The next moment we were off, and five minutes later, as we steamed rapidly down the lake, we had seen the last of Eyvind and the many friends we had left behind us in that little corner of the world.

'Well, it is over,' said Cecil, with a suspicious-sounding sigh, 'and I suppose we've finished for good with Eyvind and his people. And yet, though we *are* returning to England, I don't feel altogether so happy as I should. Somehow, it seems to me as if we had been cut adrift from some sure anchorage.'

'Right, my boy,' said Lorimer; 'but we've no reason to be ashamed—I assuredly am not—of our stay in the Paradise of the North. Though our connection with it has been rather stormy, it's a nice place on the whole. And we're not out of the wood yet, by any means; we have still that canal; and, from what I remember of it, it's rather an awkward place, to say the least of it.'

'Come, doctor,' I interposed, 'don't croak till you've reason to—there's none so far.'

It was no consolation that there soon was. After running down the lake for a couple of hours at full-speed, we slowed a little as we approached the critical point. Suddenly turning a corner, we saw the isthmus before us, occupied on both sides of the canal by a large body of sleeping men. There were no signs of our friends; and all was so quiet and unsuspecting that we began to hope that we should get through without the least disturbance. But before we had

time to wonder at the seeming torpidity, we were observed by one of Orná's more vigilant sentries; he uttered a sharp cry, and instantly there was a movement amongst the dormant invaders.

'Hold off a minute until we see what's what, Clements,' I ordered. 'And get the guns ready, my lads; we shall have a stiff fight for it.'

At that moment there was a shrill whistle, and

That whistle garrisoned the glen
At once with full five hundred men.

On every side and from behind every rock that afforded the least shelter appeared the faithful men of Hjetla; and in the twinkling of an eye they had formed into two compact corps, one on each side of the canal, and were rushing upon the enemy. The latter had barely time to jump up individually and seize their weapons, before they were on them like a whirlwind; there was a faint resistance here and there, and then the disorganised men of Reyðverá were pressed back all along the line.

'Now's the time!' I shouted, in excitement. 'Carefully, Clements—not too fast! And pepper them well as we pass, you fellows: we must keep them back from the edge!'

Next moment we were at the canal mouth. Hreidmar, prominent in full war-dress, was cheering on his men by word and example to further success; but the enemy, though driven back from the water, were now closing up and making a firmer stand. It was no time for sentimentality; we could not wait to consider such questions as the loss of other people's lives when our own were in jeopardy. As every shot counted, we did not spare them. With express and repeater we poured into Orná's ranks such a deadly and continuous hail of lead that they were thrown into yet greater confusion. Taking advantage of the opportunity, we entered the little channel, and while the fight was at its fiercest managed to accomplish half the distance. But just as we



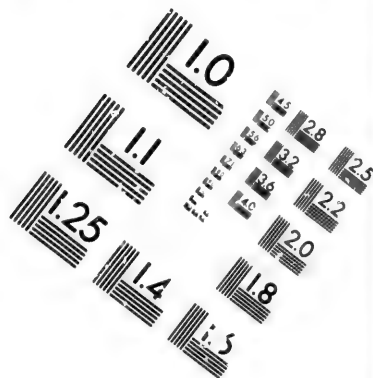
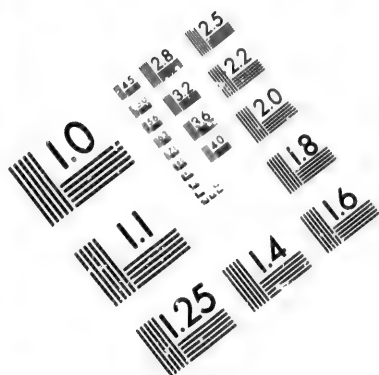
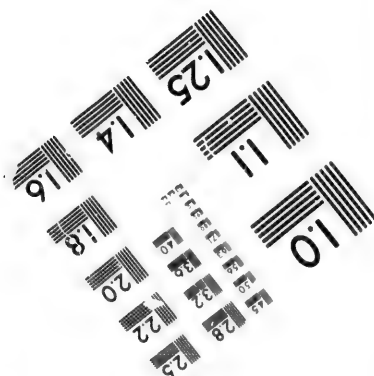
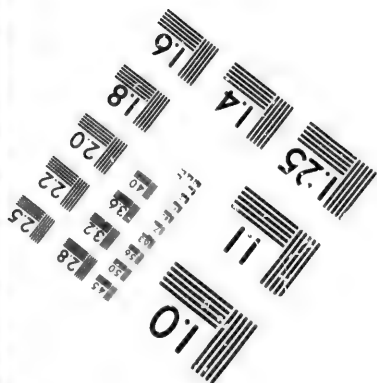
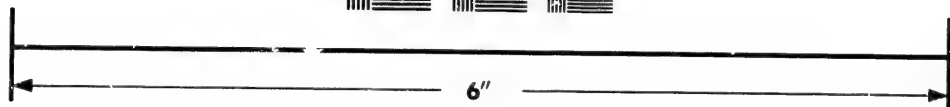
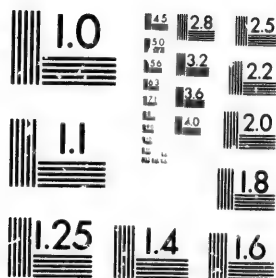


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had reached the narrowest part (that at which, according to Gates, the launch had touched the bottom on a former occasion) we had a serious repulse. On Hreidmar's side he still kept his opponents back; but on the other, where Orná commanded in person, they seemed to have become aware of our numerical weakness, and by an unexpected rally succeeded in recovering most of their ground, coming dangerously near to the bank. In fact, their vicinity was made unpleasantly real to us by a volley of javelins, that might have done some damage had Cecil not warned us in time to back the boat a little, and thus avoid them.

What passed during the next few minutes was the turning-point of the conflict, for if Orná had succeeded in reaching the edge while we were in the narrows, there would have been no hope for us. But the warriors of Hjetla were equal to the occasion. In spite of all the chief's efforts, they resolutely held their own, or only retreated step by step as they were absolutely forced.

'More steam, Clements—we must take the risk!' I cried, as the mass of struggling combatants, swaying to and fro within a few feet of us, threatened to fall upon the boat. 'If we don't get through now, we shall never have another chance!'

The engineer obeyed: there was an interval of suspense as alternately we watched our progress and the fight upon the land. At length we heard a triumphant shout from the foe; simultaneously there was a break in the ranks of our friends, and just at that instant, in the very nick of time, the good launch darted forward into the wider channel beyond!

But we were not yet safe. Owing to the shallowness of the water, we could advance but slowly, and the now infuriated soldiers of Orná on our right easily kept abreast. It was fortunate that Hreidmar had by this time completely repulsed those on the left bank. Still our position was critical enough. Closely as we fired, and fast as our opponents fell, it appeared to make no difference. Again and again they retaliated with

flights of arrows and javelins, until it was a wonder that the whole of us were not pierced through and through. At last, after a volley which laid the doctor low, I noticed Orná himself, who had hitherto kept well in the background, gesticulating fiercely in the front rank. About a score of his men, doubtless at his command, immediately plunged into the water and began to swim towards us; and at the same time we fired once more into the crowd on shore. How it happened I know not, but the next thing we saw was the chief of Reyðverá tumbling headlong into the canal, and his followers drawing back in utter consternation.

‘On! on!’ exclaimed Cecil. ‘Orná’s got a bullet through him, and now’s our chance!’

But we need have had no fear. In a minute it was all over. The chief never rose again; those of his men in the water made rapidly for the bank, and their comrades there stood still like sheep without a leader. Their enemies, seeing their fix, rallied at once; and as we finally steamed out of the canal and away, they were fleeing in every direction, relentlessly pursued by Hreidmar and his victorious soldiers. A more complete rout, in a word, it would have been difficult to imagine.

But we could not stop to congratulate our friend, for it was imperative that we should pass Orn before its inhabitants had received the news of their friends’ defeat. Besides, we did not care to be pressed to prolong our stay, as Hreidmar would certainly have done. So, after waving a farewell to him and adding a finishing touch to the enemy’s discomfiture by a most unearthly performance on the steam-whistle, we went on our way down the fjord, and were soon on the lake.

The doctor’s wound was a trifling one, caused by a javelin passing between his arm and his side and tearing the flesh. Jansen also was slightly wounded in the shoulder.

The current being with us, we came in sight of Orn, now a confused jumble of ruined houses and huts, early in the

forenoon. Unluckily, it commanded a long stretch of the lake, and if we had counted on slipping past unseen, we should have been disappointed, for we were observed long before we were abreast. Soon four boats, full of men, put out to stop us; but they were so insignificant that it was not worth while to change our course to avoid them. If they courted their fate, let them have it. As we charged down upon them, they parted to get out of the way of the launch; then there was a crash, and one of them disappeared. From the other three, now following in our wake, there was a little spear-throwing, but with our Winchesters we easily silenced them; and soon we had left them hopelessly behind.

‘Safe at last!’ said I, as the boats disappeared from sight. ‘Now, Clements, let us see how long we shall take to do the journey to the sea!’

As we raced along at a wonderful speed, all of us entered into the spirit of the fun, and cheered as we passed quickly and in succession each well-remembered spot. We dashed from the lake into the river, past the scattered houses, and did not slow until we came to the point at which we had taken our first look at Islöken, and at which we now took our last. Then on again—past the scene of Eyvind’s celebrated fight; past the ruined hunting-hut that had roused the doctor’s curiosity; between Mounts Stafford and Torrens, past the waterfall, and down to the little cove above which we had discovered the sad relics of the former expedition. How our spirits rose, and we laughed and sang, as still on we went down Oliphant Inlet, between the huge cliffs, with the twin-peaks receding into the distance behind us! It was about eight in the evening before we really saw the ocean, with the ice-blink away beyond; and shortly thereafter, while at supper, we were aroused by Wemyss’s cry:

‘The ship! the ship!’

We looked; and, true enough, there was the *Aurora* not a mile distant, steaming directly towards us. We were soon noticed; signals were run up; and, as we approached, the

little swivel was fired, the yards were manned, and we were received with cheer after cheer by the good-hearted fellows. There were tears in old Captain Snaeddon's eyes as we stepped on board after our absence of four months, and we were not much better—the reception was almost too much for us.

‘Thank God, you’re back!’ cried the old man, fervently. ‘For a month we’ve been cruising up and down on the lookout for you. I never thought I should see you again—gone like many more good men I have known—and here you are, burnt as black as niggers, and as safe and sound as ourselves!’

Neither fore nor aft was there any sleep that night until our wonderful story had been told; and when the captain heard of the conquest of the Pole, nothing would satisfy him but an immediate salute of twenty-one guns, that must have broken in upon the midnight slumbers of the four-footed inhabitants of Torrens Land!

‘It is a wonderful yarn,’ said he, ‘as wonderful as ever I heard; and if you hadn’t such proof I shouldn’t be surprised if the folks in the old country didn’t believe all you said!’

Of his own doings he had little to tell. Everything had gone on well and uneventfully at Fort Lorimer. As soon as the *Aurora* had been freed in May, he had, in accordance with my instructions, taken her on a voyage along the coast. North of Oliphant Inlet he had discovered two other estuaries with strong currents, but both were unnavigable above a certain point. He had penetrated as far as latitude $85^{\circ} 12'$, but there finding the land trending more to the west, and the ice accumulating, he had decided to go no farther. The earthquake of the previous week, he added, had been distinctly felt both at the fort and on the water. ‘And,’ he concluded, ‘everything’s ready for the return voyage—even the ice, for there’s open water to the south-east as far as can be seen.’

‘Then we shall sail to-morrow, if that’s not too soon,’ said I.

‘We’ll do it,’ he replied.

Early next morning we were at Fort Lorimer. There we took on board the garrison and everything of value, filled up with coal, and by afternoon were ready. The fort was left as it was for the benefit of ourselves or future explorers, after securing it against the attacks of predatory bears. Then, with all our flags flying, we steamed out of Weymouth Harbour and commenced our return voyage to England.

‘There’s no gold without its alloy,’ said the doctor, as we stood on deck and watched the rapidly receding mountains of Torrens Land; ‘and there’s only one thing wanting to make our success complete.’

‘Which is?’

‘A solution of the mystery still surrounding the *Northern Pharos*,’ he answered.

‘And that,’ said the captain, ‘we’re never likely to know, as far as I can see. I’m afraid we’ll have to be content with the cargo we’ve got!’

But, for once in his life, Captain Sneddon was wrong, and before he was many hours older he and the rest of us had gained a solution of that veritable mystery.



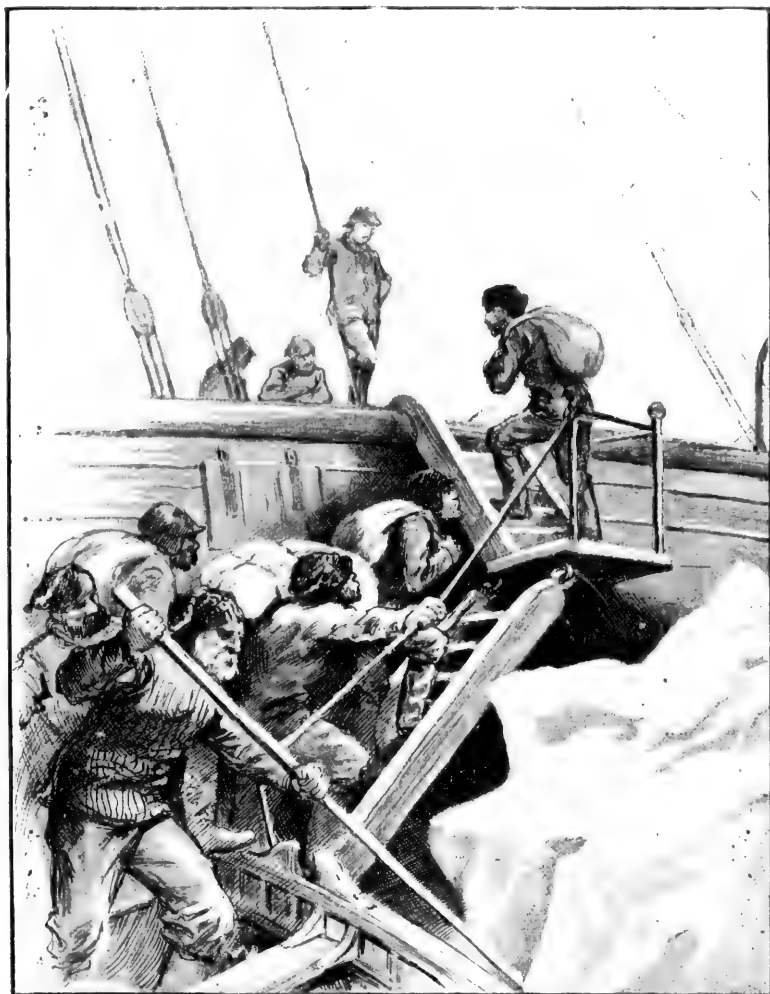
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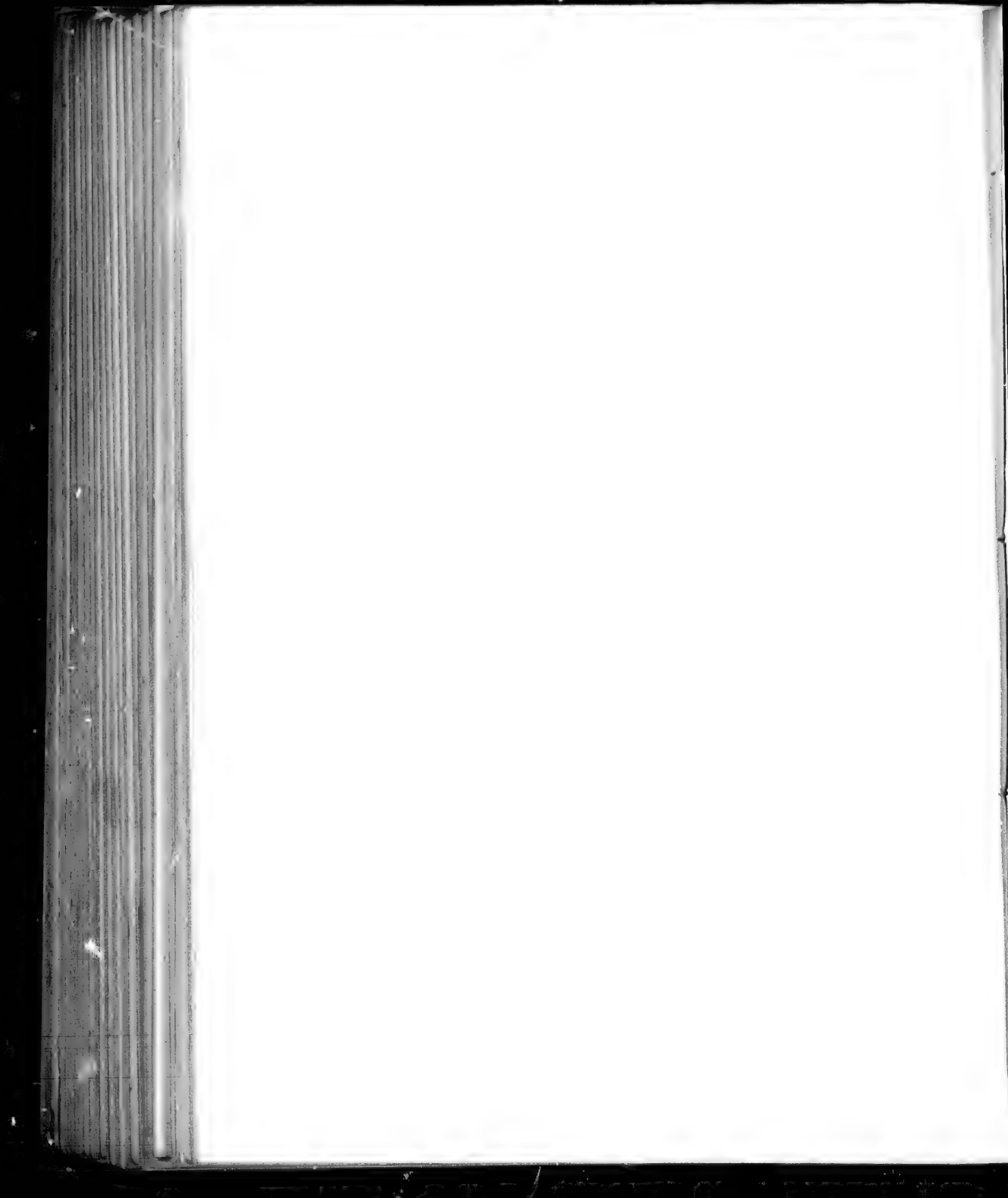
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Early next morning we were at Fort Lorimer. There we took on board the garrison and everything of value, filled up with coal, and by afternoon were ready.





CHAPTER XXVII.

SIR PHILIP STAFFORD.

THE direction of the open water compelled us to steam more to the east than otherwise we should have done; and it was in consequence of this that perhaps the strangest event that had yet occurred to us, and assuredly the most providential, happened. It came about in this way. On the day after our departure from Weymouth Harbour we were brought on deck by a cry of 'Land! land!' from the mast-head. It was apparently about three miles distant, and looked like a little cloud upon the horizon. Beyond it there was an ice-sky.

'I don't suppose we need put on shore,' said the captain, carelessly. 'It would take us too much out of our course, and it's probably only a rock.'

'We might run in a little closer, at anyrate, so as to guess its size,' suggested Lorimer.

'All right—if you like,' replied the captain, and gave the requisite orders.

How thankful he afterwards was that he did so may be imagined, for as we came nearer to the rocky islet (as it was, being of no great size) some one pointed out a curiously-shaped mound on its highest point. Then Cecil declared that he saw, through his telescope, a flagstaff above that.

'A flagstaff—nonsense!' I cried. In a minute or two, however, I had to confess that he was right.

Instantly all was excitement. For the next half-hour some five hundred theories—all but the correct one—must have

been brought forward and pooh-poohed as ridiculous. At the end of that time, being quite close to the islet and seeing no signs of inhabitants, we fired our gun to settle the question; and hardly had the echo died away before we made out not one man, or two, but nearly a score, dancing and gesticulating upon the summit as if demented! And they were evidently white men, too, for they were dressed in the garments of civilisation. Running in as near to the shore as we could with safety, we gathered from the signals of the castaways, or whatever they were, that we should take our vessel round the islet. We did so, and found that on the other side it was shaped like a horseshoe; and in the little bay forming the concavity we saw not only the cause of the rock being inhabited, but other things even more surprising. For, lying impaled upon some sharp rocks at the upper end, was the dismantled and half-demolished shell of the *Northern Pharos*; on a small stretch of beach in close proximity were several tiny wooden buildings and a larger one, and in front of them a partly completed schooner that was obviously being built of the timbers of the wrecked *Pharos*.

‘Jupiter Tonans!’ ejaculated the doctor, rubbing his eyes as if he could not believe their evidence. ‘Now, by all the powers, she *can’t* escape us!’

‘No, doctor, she’s safe enough there,’ said the captain, grimly, pointing to the rocks sticking through the bottom and sides of the ill-fated vessel. ‘And unless we stop here the *Aurora* ’ll soon be in her company.’

We did stop, and in one of the boats made for the beach, on which were now assembled all the haggard and wasted inhabitants, many of the men bearing the marks of scurvy. As we approached there was a remarkable scene. The poor fellows, to whom our arrival was as a miraculous dispensation of Providence, rushed into the water to meet us, and by their effusive welcome almost swamped the boat. Even before we had landed we were the recipients of more blessings than we are likely to receive for the rest of our lives; and it was

really pathetic to hear the loud shouts of joy and see the way in which the men handled us and the boat, as if to make sure that we were not phantoms.

‘Is the captain here?’ I asked of one of them.

Before he could give an answer Nils Jansen uttered a most ear-piercing howl, and precipitately rushed into the arms of a bystander, whom he commenced hugging and kissing with all the energy at his command. This, and a torrent of speech on both sides, went on for some time, and then the pilot recovered sufficiently to inform us that the man was his brother Karl, whom he had last seen when the *Pharos* had made her mysterious appearance at Tromsö.

‘Have I the honour of addressing Mr Oliphant?’ suddenly said a deep voice behind us. Turning, we saw in the doorway of the larger building the figure of a tall and once strong man, but now bent and worn by illness.

‘That is my name,’ I replied, glancing at him with some amazement. He was apparently between fifty and sixty, and good-looking, with a full iron-gray beard and black eyes.

‘Then may I request you and your friends to step in?’ he went on; and, more amazed still, the captain, Lorimer, Cecil, and I entered the hut, leaving the boatmen outside to the hospitality of the other castaways. The room into which the stranger led us was comfortable, evidently furnished from the ship’s cabin. He motioned us to seats.

‘I am owner of the *Northern Pharos*,’ he announced, abruptly, ‘and my name is *Sir Philip Stafford*!’

Sir Philip Stafford! In a flash I saw it all—the mystery was solved!

‘For the sake of my men I am glad you have come,’ he continued, in the same hard voice; ‘I had no idea that your vessel was still in those seas, or even that you had reached them. Indeed, I hoped not. Ten of my officers and men lie yonder’—pointing through the window to a row of

white crosses on the hillside—'and not one of us would have survived another winter. But tell me'—with a quick change of tone—'if you reached Weymouth Harbour?—if you found anything there?'

As he said this he leaned forward in his chair, and looked at us with a strange gleam in his eyes. At the moment I had half a suspicion of his sanity.

'We wintered there,' I replied. He drew a deep breath. 'But before I answer further, Sir Philip, may I ask you if you are the "P. E. Stafford" who accompanied Mr Randolph Torrens in 1855-56?'

'I am.'

'Then you have a right to know,' I said, now seeing my way clear to effect a purpose I had in view; 'and if you'll excuse my brother for a moment, he'll return to the vessel for a paper that closely concerns you.' Sir Philip changed colour a little and bowed; and, giving Cecil my keys, I whispered to him to bring me the diary of the dead sailor found on Mount Stafford. 'And as to Weymouth Harbour,' I resumed, when he was gone, 'we discovered there, under a cairn on the right-hand side of the bay, a paper running somewhat as follows'—quoting it from memory.

'Was that all?' he asked, as if relieved.

'At that point; but early this year we made a more startling discovery on the next inlet to the north'—

Sir Philip gave a gasp, half rose in his chair, and then fell back in a dead faint. While the doctor ran to his assistance, Captain Sneddon hastily demanded of me at what I was driving.

'Don't you see?' I inquired. 'If he's P. E. Stafford, he must have known about the poor fellows who died on Mount Stafford; and I want to get at the truth, for certainly it looks like a most ugly case of desertion. No wonder he faints when it's mentioned!'

Under the doctor's treatment Stafford soon recovered. 'Excuse me,' he said, 'but I have been very ill lately. I

shall be all right presently. Be good enough to go on with your story, Mr Oliphant.'

Knowing and suspecting what I did, I could scarcely keep cool enough to answer.

'And on that discovery, Sir Philip, I shall be glad if you can throw any light.'

He did not reply, and just as the silence was becoming somewhat embarrassing, Cecil returned. At once I handed Sir Philip the diary, and eagerly watched him—as also did the others—while he examined it curiously before turning over the pages.

As he read the first words he seemed about to faint again; but then, apparently steeling himself by a great effort, he read on to the end without changing a muscle.

'Thank Heaven!' he exclaimed, at last, though for what we failed to see. 'But poor Collins—what a fate! Gentlemen'—turning suddenly to us—'by this you have lifted a weight from my mind that has lain there for thirty years, and believe me that I am grateful to you—even more so for my own sake than for saving all our lives.'

'But,' interrupted the doctor, 'there is something to be explained—how these poor fellows were deserted in that way, and what became of you and the late Mr Randolph Torrens. You will pardon me, but it seems to me that these are matters into which we have now a right to inquire.'

Stafford reddened, as if in anger, and I thought he was going to refuse. But after a look at the document in his hand, he changed his mind.

'I can't but admit that right, even if I wished to do so,' he said, 'and after what has occurred I should be a hound if I did. The story is a long one, and in some respects, to me, a painful one. But if you wish it, I shall tell it to you now.'

Needless to say, we did wish it; and in substance this is the remarkable history that, then and there, he related to us. In 1855 the *Weymouth*, owned by Randolph Torrens and

him, had drifted to Torrens Land much in the same way as the *Aurora*; and after discovering Weymouth Harbour and its coal, they had wintered there pretty comfortably. In the following spring several sledging expeditions were undertaken, the last of them being the land excursion which ended so fatally on Mount Stafford. After leaving Collins and the three seamen, Torrens, Stafford, and their two companions had the utmost difficulty in managing the india-rubber canoe; and at last it capsized, drowning the sailor Pearson, and carrying with it everything they had. This was near the mouth of the inlet, where the coast is mountainous and practically impassable: and with neither provisions nor guns, the survivors were in a most deplorable situation. But they could do nothing but push on overland to the harbour. What they suffered, from the character of the ground and from want of food, Stafford even then did not care to remember; but for three days they persevered, knowing that on their efforts depended their own lives and those of their comrades.

'It was the hardest experience of my life,' said Stafford. 'We could not have made more than a few miles a day. But at length, somehow or other, we succeeded in reaching a little cape some five miles from Weymouth Harbour, and in view of it. Torrens and Rodgers were unconscious; I was not much better; but I had the presence of mind to take off my coat and affix it to the highest point. How long it was until relief came I don't know, but I still remember the kindly face of Captain Thomson as he bent over me. Then I also became unconscious. When Torrens and I recovered from the fever we had caught, it was nearly a fortnight later, and the *Weymouth* was many hundreds of miles from the harbour, amongst the ice. Rodgers was dead. Captain Thomson, acting on his own initiative, and coming to the conclusion that the remainder of the party must have succumbed, had sailed for Europe the day after rescuing us. He saw a favourable opportunity, he said, and if he had

waited longer, another winter would have had to be spent there—a thing not to be thought of.'

He paused to take breath.

'And Collins and the others?' I eagerly inquired.

'I am coming to that. When we realised what had happened, we told Thomson in the greatest horror of the manner in which we had left our companions, and implored him to turn back. At first he was as eager as we were; but after consideration he pointed out that they must already have died, and that therefore it would only be a further waste of valuable lives. Besides, as the ice was closing in, it was really impossible. He was right, and yet the idea of those men dying there, indirectly by our fault, never ceased to haunt our brains. How much it cost both Torrens and me, you can never realise; and that is why I said just now that you have conferred upon me the greatest possible blessing, by means of this'—indicating the diary. 'For by it I see that even had we been conscious it could never have benefited the poor fellows. Collins, the last of them, died on the 15th of August; it was on the 16th that we were relieved by Thomson. In a manner we are yet responsible for their deaths; but not to the degree I formerly supposed, and Randolph Torrens all his life believed.'

There he stopped; but in a little, at our request, he resumed his story. After many narrow escapes the *Weymouth*, early in October, got free from the ice, but in England people were all too much occupied with other affairs to heed the indefinite reports that were circulated concerning the voyage. Both Torrens and Stafford kept silence as to their discoveries; Captain Thomson died soon after; but the former often spoke of the consequences of their 'involuntary act of treachery,' as he persisted in calling it. For many years in succession they endeavoured to penetrate to Torrens Land; but, whether in consequence of bad seasons or bad luck, they always failed. At length they had to give it up. 'But,' said Stafford, 'I had always such a fear of the discovery of the bodies being

made by others than ourselves, and of what people would then say, that I extracted a promise from Torrens that, without my consent, he would never make another attempt during his lifetime. "We cannot help it now," I argued; "let it rest until we are dead too." Well, he agreed, and the subject was never again spoken of between us. Shortly thereafter we quarrelled bitterly about the lady he eventually married, for whose hand I was also a claimant; and for more than twenty years I never saw him, though many times have I wished that we could have a talk over old times. He kept his promise loyally, perhaps because he was too proud to ask my consent to break it; and, as for me, I tried to forget that I had ever been an Arctic traveller, by burying myself in the country, after succeeding to my father's title—and I failed.

'I was at San Remo when I heard the news of Torrens's death, and saw that paragraph in the *Sun* concerning his will. Instantly divining his purpose, I came home immediately; got a sight of the will at Somerset House, and was confirmed in my suspicions by the reference to a sealed packet. A few inquiries in Yorkshire put me on the right track. At Dundee I learned all I wanted to know. For some time I hesitated as to my course of action, but in the end I was conquered by the old morbid feeling, and decided to follow, trusting to reach Torrens Land before you. At Tromsø you nearly had me; but after you saw us we ran round to Hammerfest, and kept out of your way until you were gone.

'At first our luck was good. We were caught in the ice early in August, but on the 30th we managed to get free, at a point about fifty miles to the south-east of Torrens Land. Just as we were congratulating ourselves on our success, fortune changed. In sight of the coast we encountered a terrible storm, which in one night washed overboard all our boats, sledges, dogs, and two of the men. The vessel was driven against an iceberg, and the screw-propeller snapped. For some time she was in danger, but finally she drifted here,

and struck on these rocks. Here we have had to remain ever since. We had no boats, else I should have tried to reach Weymouth Harbour; and we could not make one from the timbers of the *Pharos*, for she had to serve as our winter quarters, dilapidated as she was. When the ice closed in, we did make several attempts to cross, but all failed. The sufferings caused by discomfort and scurvy were terrible, made worse by the death of the doctor just after Christmas. He was followed by the captain and all the officers but one; and I believe I should have succumbed myself if it had not been for the thought of the men. But the winter passed somehow, and in early spring we raised these huts, and set about building that boat'—pointing to the one outside in process of construction—'in the forlorn hope of reaching England in her. But we could never have done it—I know it; and if it had not been for your arrival, not one of us would ever have seen home again.'

And with much feeling he shook hands with us all, and thanked us once more for our fortunate if unforeseen appearance; whilst we, moved not a little by the story of his life, had no hesitation in responding to his advances.

'But in my selfishness,' he went on, in a minute or two, 'I mustn't forget that I've two men lying next door seriously ill. Medical advice has been rare with us lately.—Would you mind, sir'—addressing the doctor—'coming with me and examining them? for I'm afraid I have been treating them very much at random.'

Of course Lorimer assented, and after Stafford had handed us over to the first mate, the only surviving officer, they went off together.

Outside, the demonstrations of joy still continued. The castaways, indeed, seemed to think that if they did not give vent to their feelings they would burst; and we could not wonder at it, for the schooner in which they had hoped to escape was a miserably inadequate craft, that would have been destroyed by the most gentle pressure of the ice. Their

gratitude to us, then, and their exultation at getting away with at least a reasonable chance of success, were scarcely surprising.

On the return of Stafford and the doctor from the sick-room, with the information that the condition of the invalids was not critical, arrangements were made for the transference to the *Aurora* of everybody and of everything of value. By evening it was done; and although the addition of more than twenty men must seriously have inconvenienced our own crew and cramped their sleeping-room, it is but just to say that they were received by all on board with the heartiest hospitality. The unfinished schooner and the huts, with a record of their former occupants, were left as they were; and as we steamed away from Refuge Island I am sure there was not one of its old inhabitants who was not glad that, in all probability, he would see it no more.

‘For myself,’ said Sir Philip, ‘there is only one spot that I do not hate the very sight of, and that is the little row of graves up there on the mountain-side.’





CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

FOR close upon seven weeks the *Aurora* struggled with the ice—now darting through the narrowest leads or charging the most formidable-looking floes, more than once beset and at the mercy of wind and tide, but stopping at nothing, by the aid of dynamite and gunpowder, to get through the terrible pack. That year, unfortunately for us, it extended much farther to the south than on the preceding; but by unceasing vigilance and untiring activity on the part of officers and men alike, at length we succeeded. It was on September the 13th that, in the midst of a heavy snowstorm, we burst through the last barrier, and for the first time for many weary days saw open water in front of us as far as the eye could reach.

Four days later, to the unconcealed ecstasy of Nils and Karl Jansen, we came in sight of the rocky coast of Norway, after having caused some excitement amongst the whaling-fleets through which we passed on our way thither. Rapidly, under the skilful pilotage of Nils, we steamed through the various sounds to the town of Tromsö, reflecting meanwhile that, after an absence of sixteen months, we were again within the pale of civilisation, or, at anyrate, that phase of civilisation represented by the railway, the telegraph, and the penny post.

‘Look, you fellows!’ suddenly cried Cecil, as the town came into view, pointing in a certain direction amongst the crowd of small craft.

We did so; and there, lying close into the quay, was one of those beautiful little steam-yachts so common nowadays, and so trim and clean was it that, with national egotism, we jumped instantly to the conclusion that it belonged to an Englishman.

‘Can you make out the name?’ some one asked.

‘Wait a minute—confound that herring-boat in the way! There it is—the *Pendennis*.’

‘The *Pendennis*!’ exclaimed Sir Philip Stafford, who was standing beside us on deck, now looking much stronger. ‘Why, that’s Sir Thomas Wyllard’s vessel, unless I’m much mistaken.’

‘It is,’ said Cecil; ‘and if he’s here, there’s some hope of fresh news.’

By this time we had evidently been observed by those on the yacht, and as we steamed to our place we noticed signs of excitement on board. In a little there was a puff of white smoke from her side, followed by a report; they were saluting us. Then they ran up the signal, ‘Welcome back!’ and simultaneously a boat was lowered, but on the opposite side from us. As she was rowed out and in amongst the vessels we did not at once recognise those in her; but presently my eyes were opened by a tremendous shout from Cecil.

‘It’s Edith!’ he cried; and ‘It is Miss Torrens!’ echoed the doctor.

In a minute the boat was alongside, with Edith sitting in the stern by the side of Sir Thomas, as pretty as when we had last seen her—even prettier, Cecil says, though perhaps he’s not altogether an impartial judge. As she stepped on deck the swivel was fired in salute, and by the men she was received with a thoroughly seaman-like three times three

‘Cecil! Godfrey! how glad I am you’re back safe!’ she cried, as she greeted us all in turn before giving special attention to Cecil, to whom I left the duty of telling the

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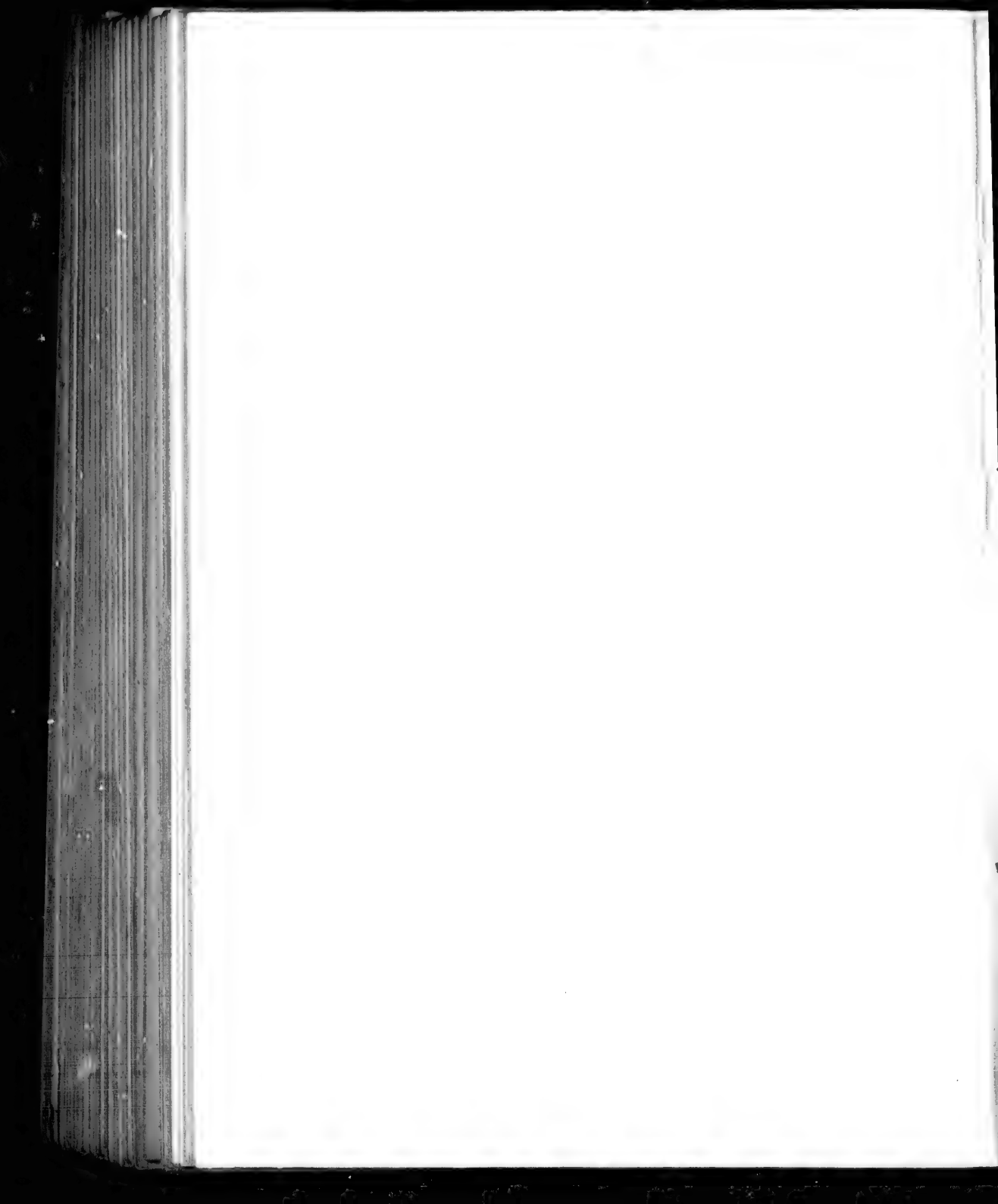
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'Cecil! Godfrey! how glad I am you're back safe!' she cried, as she greeted us all in turn.



story of our success. From Sir Thomas I heard that on Lady Wyllard offering to take her a little cruise (minus her aunt, who declined to trust herself to the treacherous ocean wave), she had persuaded her to come to the north of Norway; and for more than a month they had been cruising about in those seas, but without, as may be imagined, gleaning the least news of us. Until within the hour, indeed, they had never even suspected we were so near.

‘And so that paragraph in the *Sun*, so promptly contradicted, was true after all?’ said Sir Thomas. ‘But who’s this?’—as Stafford came forward. ‘Not Stafford, surely! That’s where you’ve been for the last twelvemonth, is it? though I must say the Arctic air doesn’t seem to have agreed with you.—Well, Oliphant!’—in a tone of genuine regret—‘if I had only known, I might have made that paragraph much more sensational than it was!’

This, it seems to me, is a favourable point at which to end our personal narrative. Little remains to be told. Next day, after saying farewell to the Jansens and landing the dogs—except König, with whom the doctor would on no account part—we sailed for home in company with the *Pendennis*. The men, on being discharged, were thoroughly pleased with themselves, their pay, and the gratuity of one hundred pounds to each, to which Sir Philip added a substantial sum. More than one of them in my hearing echoed the remark of Gates that he hoped it wouldn’t be long before there was again a similar expedition.

Dr Felix Lorimer lost no time in annihilating Dr Hamilton Nelson, and so effectively that the latter threw up his professorship, and accepted a much less lucrative one in America. The defeat must have been very severe.

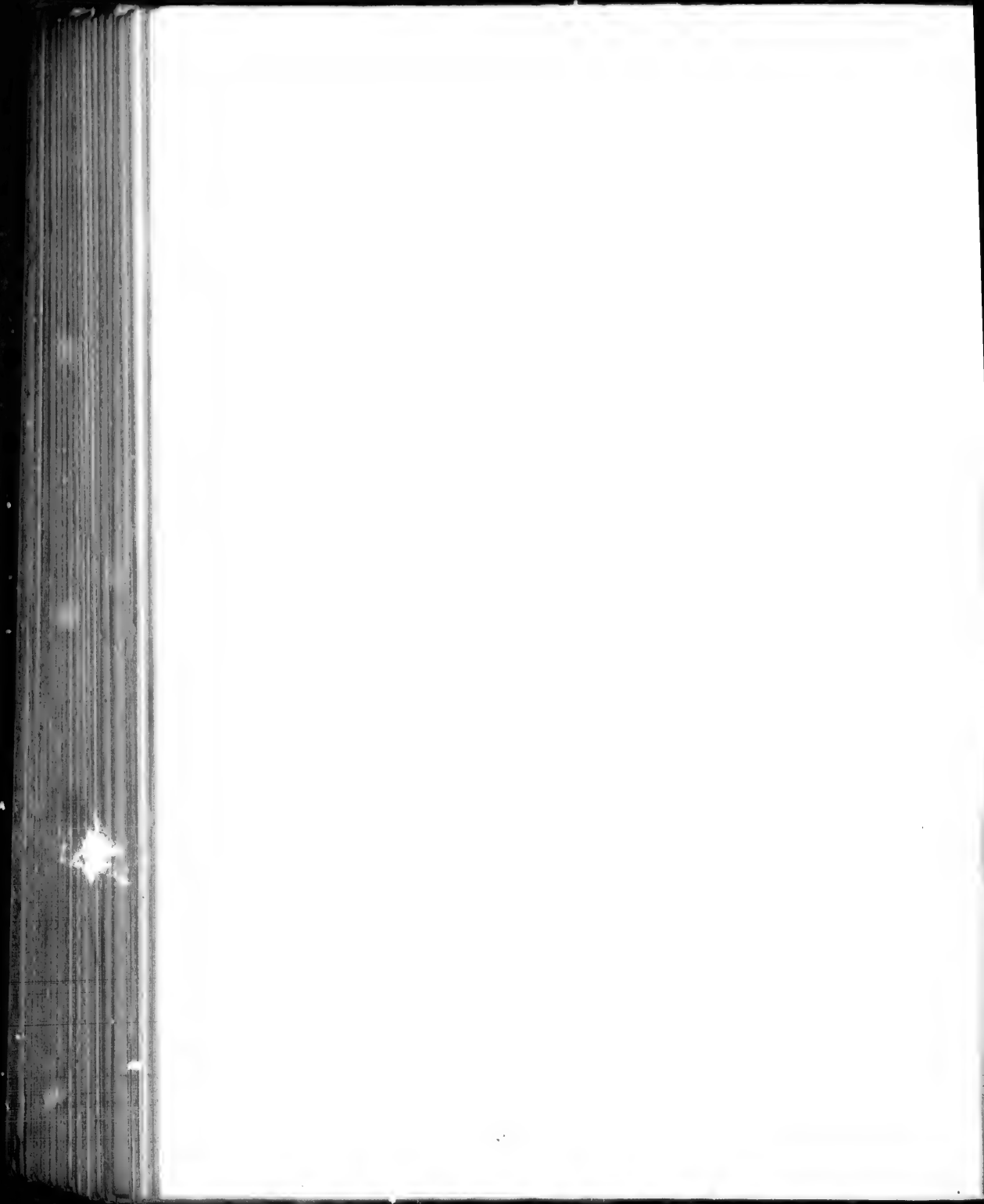
Before Christmas there was a marriage at the Grange; and when Cecil and his bride had started for Sir Philip Stafford’s place in Devon, where they were to spend the honeymoon, the rest of us who had been with him to the

Arctic—Captain Sneddon, Lorimer, Wemyss, Clements, and Stafford—had a long and regretful talk over the days spent there and the strange experiences through which we had gone. But as a secret, known only to Professor Lorimer and a select few, I may tell you that it may not be long before we make another effort to penetrate through the ice to the high latitudes of Torrens Land, and pay a second visit to King Eyvind—as we hope to find him—and our other friends in the Paradise of the North.

THE END.

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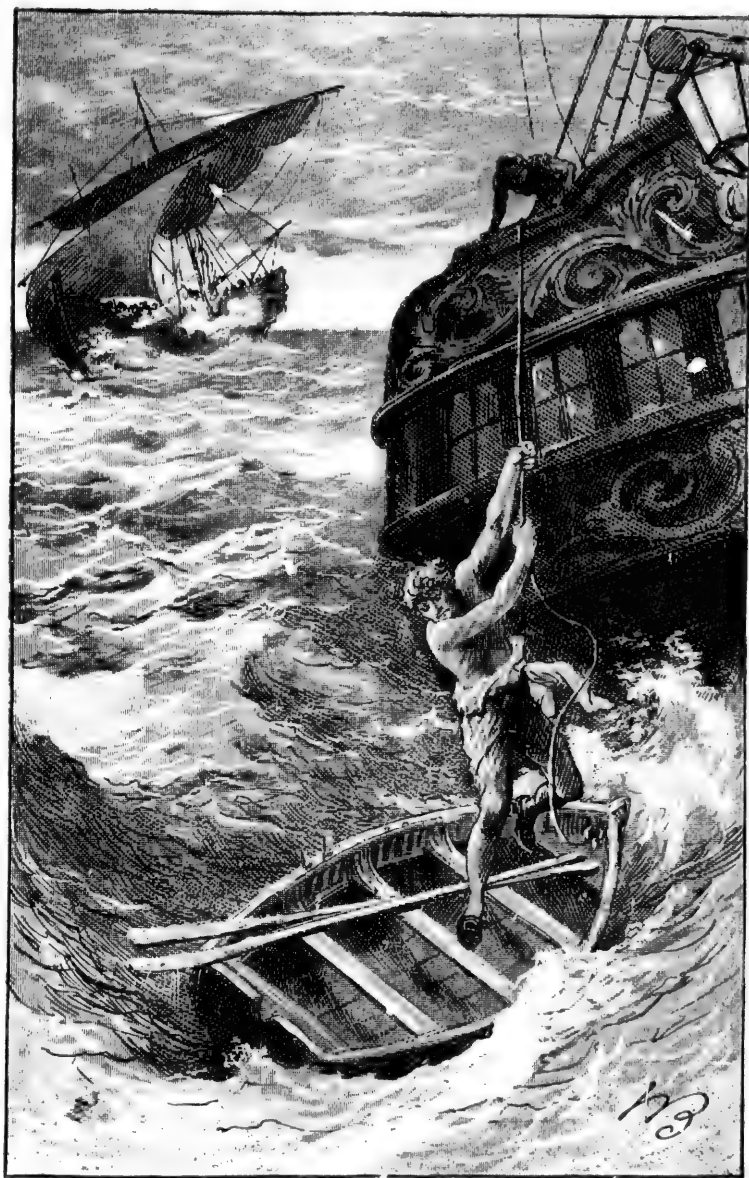
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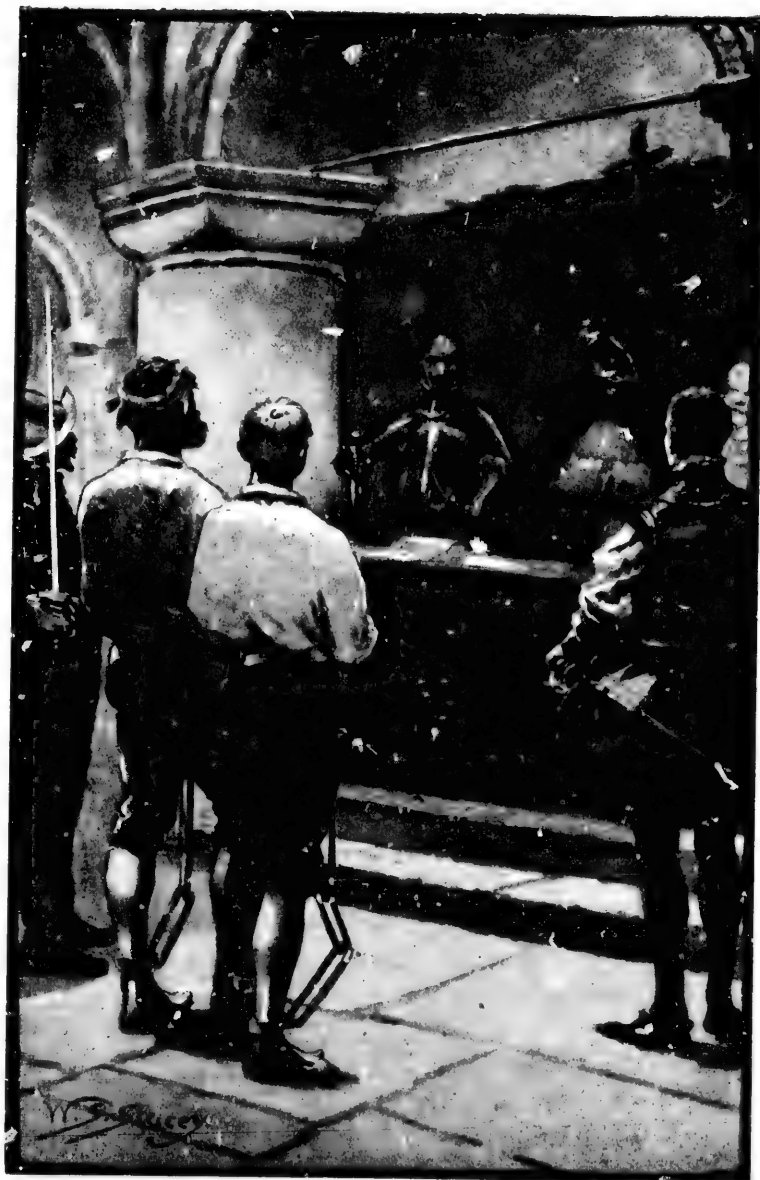
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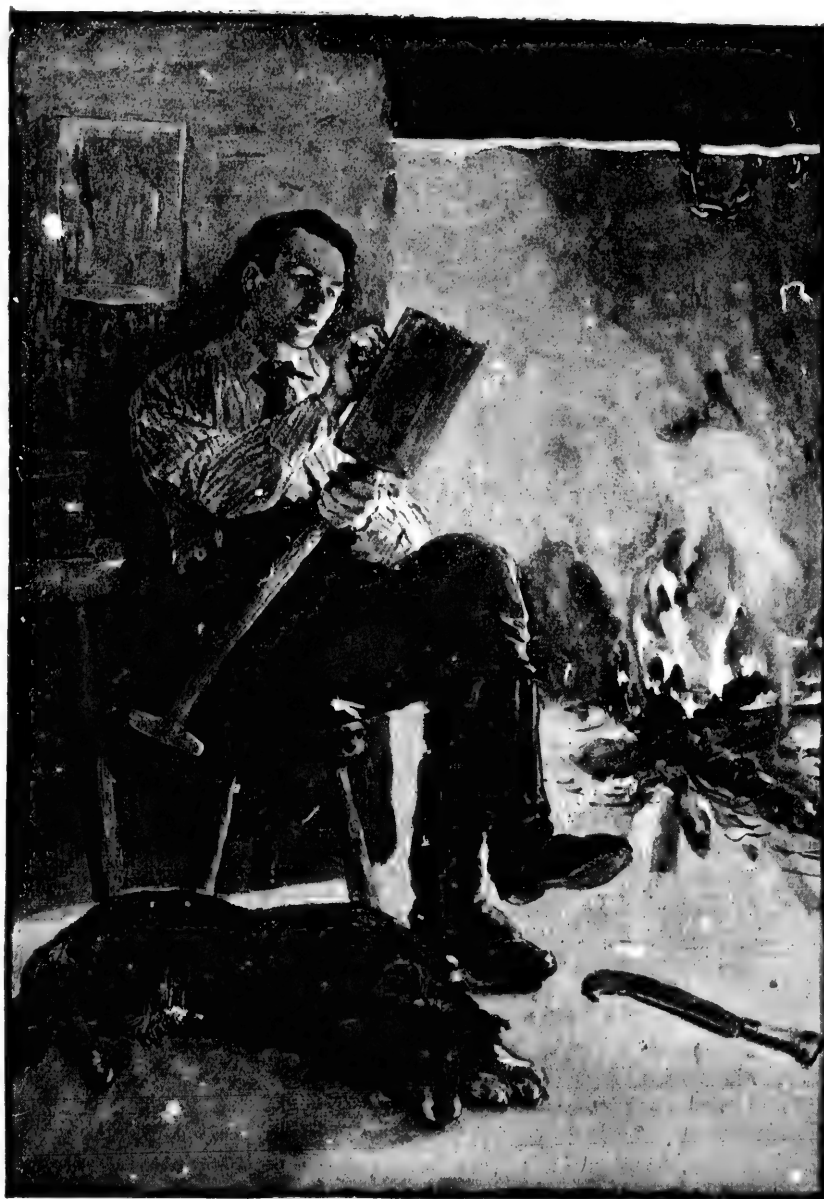
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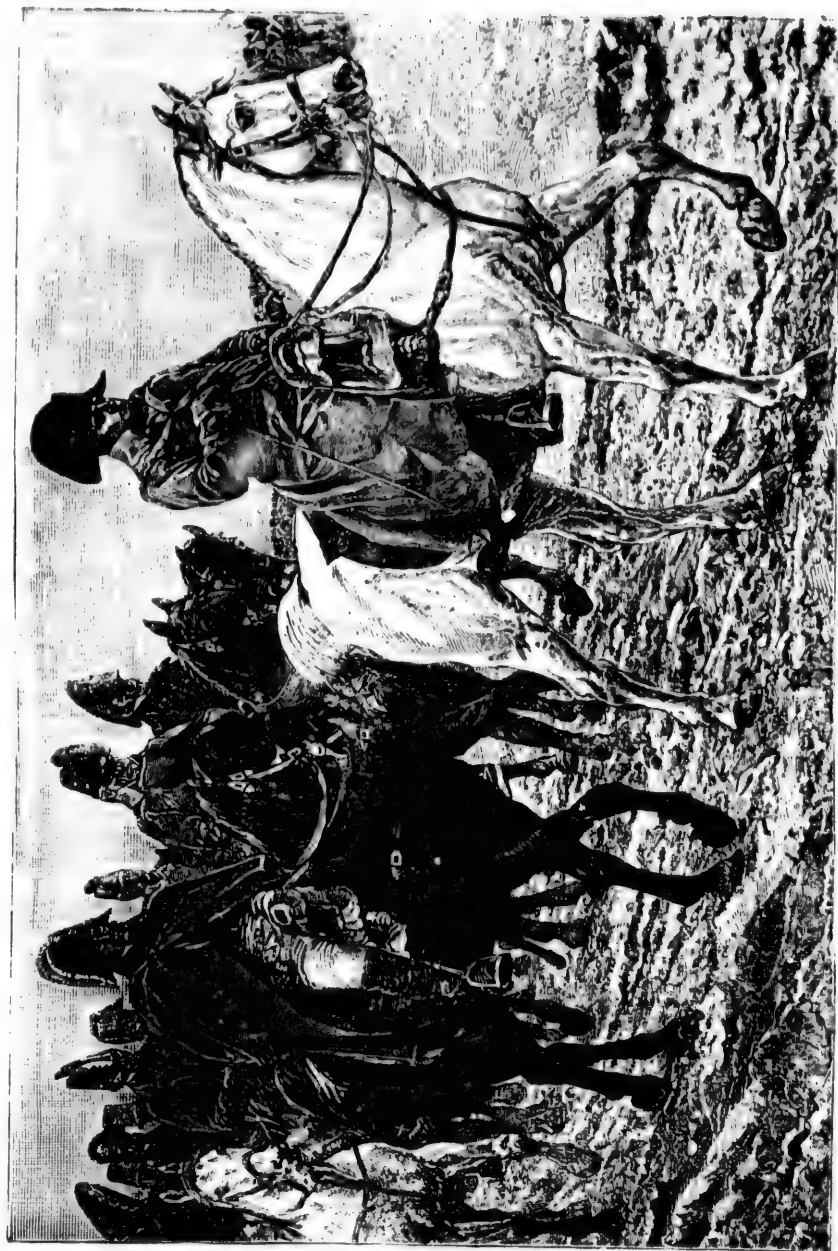
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